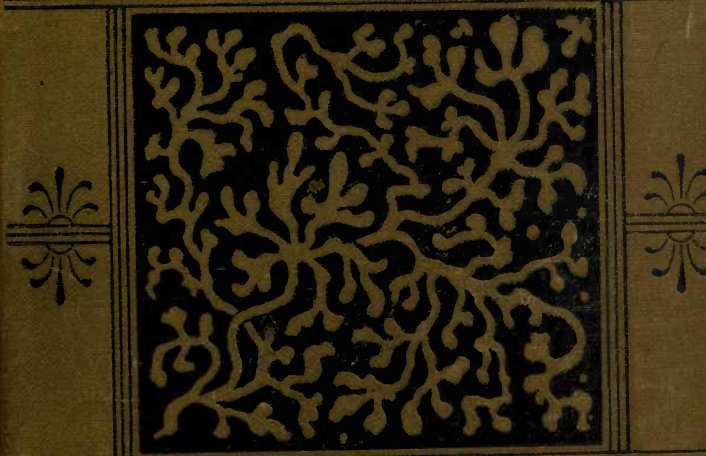


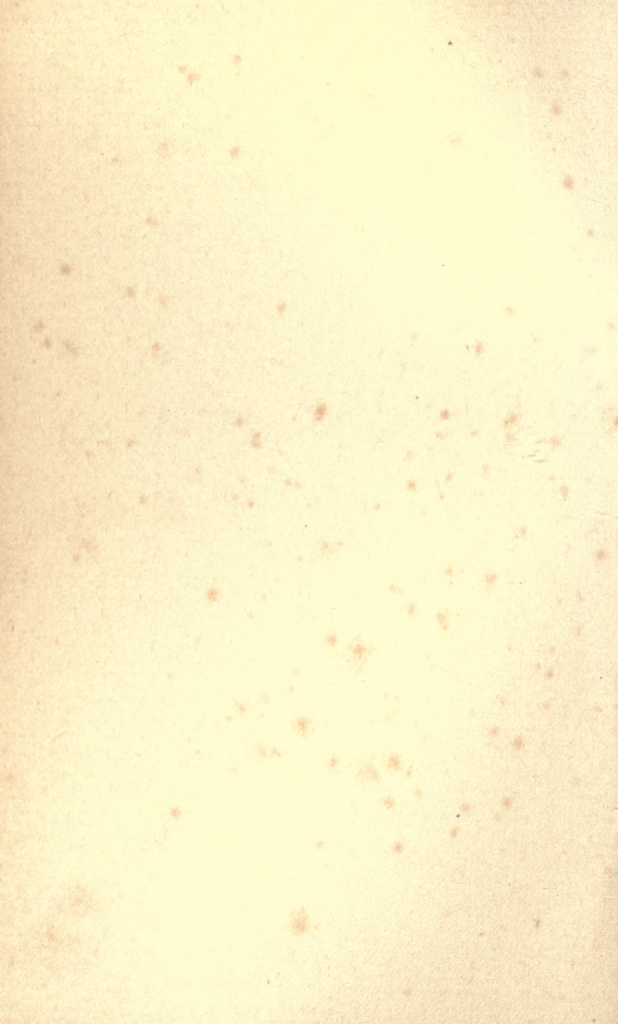


CHRISTIE'S NEXT THINGS





Kate H. Sanborn,



Katy C. Sanborn.







Christie's Next Things. FRONTISPIECE.

Christie's Next Things.

BY

MINNIE E. KENNEY,

AUTHOR OF "MRS. MORSE'S GIRLS," "BERNIE'S LIGHT,"
"THE WHATSOEVER TEN," ETC.



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“DOE YE NEXTE THYNGE.”

FROM an old English parsonage
Down by the sea,
There came in the twilight
A message to me.
Its quaint Saxon legend
Deeply engraven,
Hath, as it seems to me,
Teaching from heaven.
And through the hours
The quiet words ring
Like a low inspiration :
“Doe ye nexte thyng.”

Many a questioning,
Many a fear,
Many a doubt
Hath its quieting here.
Moment by moment,
Let down from heaven,
Time, opportunity,
Guidance, are given.
Fear not to-morrows,
Child of the King ;
Trust them with Jesus.
“Doe ye nexte thyng.”

Do it immediately,
Do it with prayer,
Do it reliantly,
Casting off care.
Do it with reverence,
Tracing his hand
Who lays it before thee
With earnest command.
Stayed on Omnipotence,
Safe 'neath his wing,
Leave Him the issue :
“Doe ye nexte thyng.”



CHRISTIE'S NEXT THINGS.



CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING.

It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon in the early part of June. All day long the sky had been an intense sapphire, flecked here and there with tiny white cloudlets, which floated lazily before the fitful breezes. One might have imagined that they were reflections of the snowy-winged sail boats that drifted with the tide upon the broad river, which seemed to catch and mirror back again the translucent blue of the sky.

The soft air was fragrant with the breath of the June roses which ran riot in the somewhat old-fashioned garden that surrounded a pretty cottage. Climbing roses shaded the wide porch and hung over the windows, while every breath of air brought a shower of their pink and white petals to the ground. A large Jacqueminot bush was fairly ablaze with its gorgeous blossoms, and

close beside it a moss rose added its spicy perfume to the fragrance which flooded the air.

Christie Gilbert strayed from bush to bush, plucking a bud here, and a full-blown rose there, till her hands were laden, and then she bent her face caressingly over the soft petals, and drew long breaths of content as she inhaled the fragrance. Christie loved roses dearly, her flowers she called them, since her birthday came in the month of roses, and she cherished a real affection for every bush in the garden.

"How beautiful these are!" she exclaimed at last. "I must take some over to Aunt Patience."

It was but a little distance that she had to go, so opening the gate she passed out into the street, the afternoon sun trickling through the branches of the old elms which bordered the road, and falling in shimmering flecks of light and shade upon her fair hair and white dress.

The serene face and Quaker-like attire of the old lady sitting upon the porch of a little cottage before which Christie paused, seemed a part of the Sabbath stillness and peace.

"Aunt Patience" every one called her, but in truth she had no kindred, and might have accounted her lot a sad and lonely one, if her nature had been less sweet and responsive to

every one with whom she was brought in contact.

As long as her health and strength remained she had been an active worker, with heart and hands always ready to aid any one who came to her for help; but of late she had grown very feeble, and the greater part of her days were passed in the invalid chair in which Christie found her this afternoon.

As Christie paused a moment with her hand upon the latch of the gate, she looked at her friend admiringly, with all a girl's love for the beautiful. The snow-white hair, as soft and fine as spun silk, was parted over a placid forehead, which looked as if anxiety and care had never ruffled it, though time had laid his hand upon it, and accentuated the furrows which spoke of his flight. The light had not yet faded entirely from the gray eyes, though they had grown somewhat dim, and every feature seemed softened by the touch of old age, just as the twilight blends and softens all the features of a landscape which may seem rugged and stern in the garish light of noonday.

"Shall I disturb you if I come in a little while, Aunt Patience?" asked Christie, and the reverie in which the old lady had been absorbed was broken at once by the clear young voice.

"Come in, my dear, I shall be very glad of your company a little while," she answered, and as Christie leaned over her to bestow a loving caress upon her, she smiled affectionately at the young girl.

"No, I don't want a chair, thank you. I would rather sit right here on the steps at your feet," Christie exclaimed, slipping into her favorite attitude, with her head resting against Aunt Patience's knee.

"I was thinking about you only a few minutes ago," said Aunt Patience presently, her soft hand giving caressing touches to Christie's hair. "I wonder if you came over on purpose to get the message I had gathered for you."

"Perhaps I did," Christie answered; "I thought I came only to bring you these roses, but I shouldn't be surprised if you gave me something to take away with me. You very often do, I know."

"Do you remember what you were saying a few weeks ago when you came over here one Sunday evening? You were wishing that you knew the plan of your life, and could see now just what you were to do with your future, so that there would be no danger of your making a mistake and leaving undone some mission that you were intended to accomplish."

"I remember that day," Christie answered. "I was in such a horrible mood of self-dissatisfaction. I do have spasms of remorse every now and then when I realize what a useless creature I am. I might just as well be a butterfly for all the good I accomplish by living. I just have a good time, and that is all. I would like to believe that I was made for some purpose, and then I would like to know how to go about accomplishing that purpose. Once in a while I try to make really good plans, but I never can carry them out, for some interruption always comes, so I have about made up my mind to drift aimlessly along, without trying to accomplish anything."

"I was reading a chapter in this book, a little while ago that brought you to my mind," said Aunt Patience. "I thought it might help you in settling your perplexities, and give you a motto by which you might make your whole life fruitful of good, without any fear of mistake. Shall I read a little to you, dear?"

"Yes, please," answered Christie, nestling her cheek against the soft wrinkled hand.

"'Duty is never a hap-hazard thing,'" read Aunt Patience. "'It does not come to us in bundles from which we may choose what we like best. There are never half a dozen things, any

one of which we may fitly do at any particular time; there is some one definite and particular thing in the divine purpose for each moment. In writing music, no composer strews the notes along the staff just as they happen to fall on this line or that space; he sets them in harmonious order and succession so that they will make sweet music when played or sung. The builder does not fling the stones and the beams into the edifice without plan; every block of stone and every piece of wood or iron has its place, and the building rises in graceful beauty. The days are like the lines and spaces in the musical staff, and the duties are the notes; each life is meant to be a perfect harmony, and in order to this each duty has its own proper place. One thing done out of its time and place makes discord in the music of life, just as one note misplaced on the staff mars the harmony. Each life is a building, and the little acts are the materials used; the whole is congruous and beautiful only when every act is in its own true place. Everything is beautiful in its time, but out of time the loveliest acts lose much of their loveliness.

““Far better in its place the lowliest bird
Should sing aright to Him the lowliest song,
Than that a seraph strayed should take the word
And sing His glory wrong.”

“The art of true living consists largely therefore in doing always the thing that belongs to the moment. But how to know what is the duty of each moment is a question which to many is full of perplexity. Yet it would be easy if our obedience were but more simple. We have but to take the duty that comes next to our hand—that which the moment brings. “Doe ye nexte thyng,” says the quaint old Saxon legend. Our duty is never some far-away thing. We do not have to search for it; it is always close at hand and easily found. The trouble is that we complicate the question of duty for ourselves by our way of looking at life, and then get our feet entangled in the meshes which our own hands have woven.

“If this is the way God guides, it never ought to be hard for us to find our duty. It never lies far away, inaccessible to us, but is always near, always “ye nexte thyng.” It never lies out of our sight in the darkness, for God never puts our duty where we cannot see it. The thing that we think may be our duty, but which is still lying in obscurity and uncertainty, is not our duty yet, whatever it may be a little farther on. The duty for the very moment is always clear, and that is as far as we need concern ourselves, for when we do the little that is

clear, we will carry the light on, and it will shine on the next moment's step.' ”

“If the ‘nexte thynges’ were only labelled,” sighed Christie: “but how can I tell whether I am just following my own fancy or really doing what has been planned for me?”

“There is an answer here to your question,” said Aunt Patience; “if you are not tired of listening, I will read it to you: ‘Prompt, unquestioning, undoubting following of Christ takes all the perplexity out of Christian life, and gives unbroken peace. There is something for every moment, and duty is always “ye nexte thynges.”’ It may sometimes be an interruption, setting aside a cherished plan of our own, breaking into a pleasant rest for which we had arranged, or taking us away from a favorite occupation. It may be to meet a disappointment, to take up a cross, to endure a sorrow, or to pass through a trial. It may be to go up-stairs and be sick for a time, letting go one’s hold on all active life; or it may be just the plainest, commonest bit of routine, daily work in the house, in the office, on the farm, at school. Most of us find the greater number of our “nexte thynges” in the tasks that are the same, day after day, yet even in the interstices amid these set tasks, there come a thousand little things of kindness,

patience, gentleness, thoughtfulness, obligingness, like the sweet flowers that grow in the crevices between the cold hard rocks; and we should always be ready for these as we hurry along, as well as for the sterner duties that our common calling brings to us.' "

CHAPTER II.

A LAST MESSAGE.

"THAT is lovely!" exclaimed Christie impulsively, as the quiet voice ceased. "Why, it makes living such an easy thing, and yet such a grand thing too. It sounds as simple as working a sampler, one stitch after another, in its right place, and the pattern just seems to grow naturally without any special effort. I am so glad you read me that, Aunt Patience. Where did you find such helpful thoughts?"

Aunt Patience handed Christie the volume that lay in her lap.

"Your favorite author, I see," Christie said with a smile, as she read the title "Practical Religion." "It was just exactly what I needed, and I'm ever so much obliged to you for gleaning it for me. I know I shall accomplish ever so much more if I content myself with 'nexte thynges' instead of looking way ahead all the time; and even if they are little bits of things, they must be worth doing if they are all planned for me."

"The ministry of 'nexte thynges' is a very

helpful ministry," said Aunt Patience, "and even if they may seem very small sometimes and hardly worth doing, yet after all it is these little things that make most of the sunshine and brightness of life. It is not given to many to do great things, but we can all consecrate ourselves to a ministry of helpfulness in little things. I have thought so often, dear, that if you were watchful for little opportunities, you could do so much to brighten the lives of all with whom you come in contact. You can influence your friends so readily, and it is so easy for you to say sympathetic encouraging things, that you could make many a rough path smooth for those whose lives are less happy than your own. I can fancy all the good you would do if you lived up to your possibilities of Christian usefulness; and it is my prayer for you, Christie, that you may not be content with simply drifting, but may really make your life a helpful one. A consecrated life does n't mean a solemn, joyless one, but it ought to be brighter and happier than one which is lived just for self and selfish aims."

"I *do* want to make my life a consecrated one," said Christie softly. "You know I do, don't you, Aunt Patience? I can't talk about such things to other people, and because I am

full of fun and enjoy good times so much, every one thinks I am frivolous and worldly; but I know you understand me better than that. You know I am not satisfied just to live for myself, though I don't seem to do much else."

"You want to live for Him who bought you with a price," said Aunt Patience, resting her hand again upon the fair hair. "Yes, Christie, I know you better than to think that you are willing to live for self. I would not have you less happy and full of life. God has bestowed upon you the gift of a sunshiny, hopeful nature, so you may be a centre of happiness, brightening every life that touches yours, and it would be wrong to undervalue it and try to change it; but you can consecrate it, just as truly as you can any gift of music or intellect, to God's service, and make it serve him. The more winsome and lovable a Christian's life is, the better it glorifies Christ. Try to live for him day by day, dear, and instead of dreaming of the future and mapping out plans for yourself, follow his guidance, and be content to 'doe the nexte thyng,' believing that it is a step in the path in which he would lead you."

The peaceful afternoon was drawing to its close, and the west was already beginning to glow with the evening fires. The silver tinkle

of a bell broke the silence, and Christie looked up with a little sigh.

"If I could always be with you, Aunt Patience, I believe I could be good," she said. "You always help me so, and I am better for just looking at you, I do believe; you don't know how I love you," and she pressed her lips impulsively to the soft cheek. "I must go now, for I hear the tea bell ringing, so I will leave my roses with you for company. I brought them over on purpose for you, and here I have been keeping them myself all this time. Good-by; I shall try to remember our talk, and perhaps it will save me from getting into such tangles as I so often do. Living is such a mixed up thing with me, but it seems simple enough when I am with you."

"You will find it easy, dear, if you will let it be so," replied Aunt Patience. "Just give up your own planning and care-taking, and simply 'Doe the nexte thynges.'"

The words lingered in Christie's thoughts as she left her friend and retraced her steps homeward, looking back as she reached the gate to wave a last farewell.

"Isn't she just a picture, sitting there with the roses in her hands, and her face so peaceful and loving!" thought Christie. "I should be

happy if I thought my life could ever be like hers, for she is such a dear old saint that it makes one want to be good just to look at her."

By the time the evening meal was concluded the bells were ringing their first summons to church, and Christie hurried away, for she had promised to try over an anthem with the choir before the service should begin.

She wondered not a little at the unusual absence of her father and mother, for they had expected to follow her a little later; and she was glad when the last hymn had been sung, that she might hasten home to see what had detained them. Her mother met her at the gate.

"Why, mother, I was afraid you were sick or something had happened, when I did not see you at church," exclaimed Christie, feeling a vague sense of alarm at something in her mother's manner. "Something *has* happened; you have tears in your eyes. Oh, mother, what is it?"

"Hush, dear, do not be frightened," and her mother drew Christie gently down beside her upon the porch steps. "Dear Aunt Patience has gone home."

"Oh, mother, she is n't *dead*; you do n't mean that!" sobbed Christie, clinging to her mother, as if she feared that she, too, might be taken away from her.

"You will not think of it as death, darling, when you see her," the mother answered gently. "It is the sleep which God gives his beloved, so peaceful and calm. It must have been just after you left her this evening, Christie dear, for when they went out to call her they found her sitting there as she had been all the afternoon, with a smile upon her face and her hands full of your roses. Her life had closed as peacefully and tranquilly as this Sabbath afternoon, and as the sunshine grew dim here, she entered into heaven's glory, without a pang or parting sorrow. We must rejoice in her happiness, darling, and not think of our own loss."

But Christie's tears flowed fast, and for a time she could not be comforted. All her life she had known and loved Aunt Patience, and few had known how warm and deep the friendship was that existed between the two. Christie felt as if she could not spare this helpful friend out of her life, and she longed to feel the loving touch of her hand again and listen to her words of helpfulness. She had an instinctive fear of death, too, and it terrified her to think that Aunt Patience was in the cold embrace of that last enemy. This feeling vanished, however, when later she accompanied her mother over to the little cottage where a knot of crape already

made a sombre blot in the moonlight, and looked upon the quiet features which had reflected every emotion but a few short hours ago.

There was nothing dreadful about that placid face and the hands folded restfully; and as Christie looked through a mist of blinding tears at the features she loved so dearly, she felt comforted, and some of the peace that illumined them crept into her heart.

She was so glad now that she had spent that last hour with Aunt Patience; it made heaven seem more real and near to her to think that she had so lately been conversing with one who was now one of the inhabitants of that heavenly city, and she was sure that she would never forget those last words of loving counsel.

She lay awake long that night, her thoughts full of Aunt Patience and the beautiful life that had passed away so peacefully as the sunset gates stood ajar; and thinking of the glories into which she had entered, she could almost rejoice even while her heart ached with a sense of loss.

A few days later a piece of paper was found in the well-worn Bible, upon which were inscribed some verses in the familiar tremulous writing, and upon the outside of the page was pencilled "For Christie."

When Christie read the lines she knew that Aunt Patience had copied them for her with the thought in her heart that had been the subject of her last conversation; and she prized the feebly traced lines all the more because they had come to her as Aunt Patience's last message:

“DOE YE NEXTE THYNGE.”

From an old English parsonage
Down by the sea
There came in the twilight
A message to me.
Its quaint Saxon legend,
Deeply engraven,
Hath, as it seems to me,
Teaching from heaven;
And through the hours
The quiet words ring
Like a low inspiration:
“Doe ye nexte thyng.”

Many a questioning,
Many a fear,
Many a doubt
Hath its quieting here.
Moment by moment,
Let down from heaven,
Time, opportunity,
Guidance, are given.
Fear not to-morrows,
Child of the King;
Trust them with Jesus.
“Doe ye nexte thyng.”

Do it immediately,
Do it with prayer,
Do it reliantly,
Casting off care.
Do it with reverence,
Tracing his hand
Who lays it before thee
With earnest command.
Stayed on Omnipotence,
Safe 'neath his wing,
Leave Him the issue :
"Doe ye nexte thyng."

Christie read the quaint lines over again and again, before she folded the paper and laid it away among the treasures in her desk.

She could hear Aunt Patience's voice again, as its accents had fallen upon her ears for the last time in the stillness of the Sabbath twilight, "Doe ye nexte thyng," and she determined that by this watchword she would guide her life. She would no longer yearn for a future full of grand possibilities, but she would tread the path that stretched before her girlhood's feet, content to be led. For the sake of the Saviour to whom she had consecrated her young life, and for the sake of the dear friend who had done so much to lead her to Christ, she would take upon herself the ministry of helpfulness, willing only to do the duty of each hour in his name.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLASS MOTTO.

THE seven seniors of Maplewood Institute were holding an informal meeting under the old elm at the foot of the lawn. Class-meetings were events of daily and sometimes semi-daily occurrence, there were so many momentous matters connected with their graduation to decide upon.

"What shall we have?" Grace Davenport had asked, and the question had called forth a perfect babel of answers.

"Don't let's have a Latin motto, whatever else we have!" exclaimed Ella Lindsay. "I think every Latin remark that was ever made has been tortured into a class motto by some of the Maplewood graduates, and I believe the seniors last year could n't find a motto left but 'Excelsior.' I know they worked harder to find one than they did to choose the subjects for their essays."

"Don't have a French one either," chimed in Elsie Dunning. "That would be so frivolous for a class that pretend to the common sense and practical wisdom that we claim."

"What can we have, then?" asked Ella

Lindsay. "Surely you don't want us to be commonplace enough to take one of Poor Richard's proverbs!"

"Never put off till to-morrow what can be done to-day," laughed Louise Rushton. "I am afraid I should hear too much about the peculiar appropriateness of that motto if we decided upon it. I believe I would rather be frivolous and choose an untranslatable French motto."

Every one laughed, for Louise was noted for her easy-going procrastination.

A sudden remembrance brought an eager flush to Christie's cheek.

"Oh, I know of one that we could have that would be just the thing!" she exclaimed.

"Is it sensible?" asked Elsie.

"Of course it is," exclaimed Ella. "Christie, don't notice the imputation upon your good sense, but tell us what you have in mind. We are eager for suggestions."

Christie hesitated a moment.

"Well, I will tell you all about it, girls," she said in a moment, conquering her reluctance to speak of Aunt Patience's last words to her before that merry group.

As she began the laughing faces grew earnest, for there was not one among them who had not known and loved the dear old saint. The quaint

old Saxon motto was unanimously adopted as the class legend, perhaps all the more readily because it would be so closely associated with their friend, who had never outgrown her sympathy with young girls.

"Doe ye nexte thyng."

Ella Lindsay pencilled the words in old English characters on the back of an envelope, and held it up for the girls' inspection.

"That will be so pretty," said Louise, with a little sigh of satisfaction, "and it's such a tangible sort of motto. One can take hold of it and fit it in for real use. It is n't one of those vague, soaring aspirations that are always out of your reach."

"I'm glad the question of a motto is settled," said Florence Dinsmore. "Now we must give our minds up to the question of dress, and really come to a decision to-day, for we have only two weeks before us."

"Shall we wear white, or any color that suits us best?" asked Elsie, her mind rather undecided between the merits of a pale blue surah which had been a recent birthday gift, or an elaborate white, which would have to be a new acquisition to her wardrobe.

"If we all wear white the class would be in uniform as far as color, or, to speak more cor-

rectly, lack of color, went, and yet we would have an opportunity for individuality too," said Ella Lindsay.

"I vote for colors," exclaimed Achsah Howe in tones that were almost sharp, they were so eager.

"Ishmael has her mind quite made up, at all events," laughed Louise Rushton. "Now I hope all the rest of us who are equally fortunate will express our preferences quite as unreservedly."

Christie glanced at the thin, sharp-featured face of the girl sitting next to her with a sudden curiosity. Why was she so anxious for colors to be decided upon? It was no trifling matter to her, to judge from her suppressed eagerness.

Achsah Howe was "queer;" her schoolmates had decided upon that before she had been twenty-four hours in the Institute, and now, at the close of the three years she had spent among them, they had seen no reason to change their opinion.

She was the one boarder at the school, and had never been home for her vacations, nor had friends ever visited her. She was not an attractive or prepossessing girl, yet she had won for herself a certain place in the respect of her schoolmates, if not in their liking.

She had delicate features, which might have

been pleasant if it had not been for the half-defiant, half-fretful expression which marred them. Her complexion was a clear dark olive, which, with her bright dark eyes and black hair, gave her a foreign aspect.

No one could accuse her of vanity, for she evidently paid no attention to her personal appearance. Christie had fancied sometimes that there was a certain defiance in the way in which she brushed her hair straight from her forehead and twisted it into a hard, uncompromising knot in the back, and in the straight linen bands around her neck, instead of the ruching which might have lent a softness to her face.

Achsah's wardrobe had always been a subject for much private speculation and amusement among her classmates, although not one of them had ever been guilty of the discourtesy of open ridicule.

Her dresses were old-fashioned in texture and pattern, and were made with little regard to the prevailing styles.

Achsah might have made some slight alterations in them herself, which would have made her appearance less singular, but she wore her odd garments with the greatest unconcern apparently, and walked all the more proudly when she differed most from her schoolmates.

Her manner was sharp even to irritability, and she was apt to differ decisively from every opinion that her classmates expressed.

"Ishmael," the irrepressible Louise had dubbed her, and the sobriquet expressed her peculiar disposition so well that it had become generally adopted among the girls.

Achsah had never objected to it in any way, so she quite as often answered to that title as to her own name. She had no special friend, nor indeed had she ever seemed to care for the company of the girls. During the last year, when matters of general interest to the class were being talked over, she formed one of the group and expressed her opinion with her usual freedom upon any subject that was under discussion, but at other times she held herself aloof.

Achsah's individuality was as marked in her classes as anywhere else. She was undoubtedly a talented girl; but in addition to her talent she was ambitious and energetic, and never rested content with less than absolute perfection in her recitations.

She had completed in three years the course of study over which her classmates had spent five years, but there had been nothing superficial in her acquirements. She had ranked first at every examination, and none of her schoolmates could

remember that Achsah had ever failed in a single recitation.

No one could withhold respect and admiration for Achsah's abilities, and she seemed to take a grim pleasure in compelling from them the admission that intellectually she was the leader of the school, notwithstanding her appearance and manners.

"Well, Christie, what is your choice?"

Christie started. She had been so absorbed in her thoughts that she had not heard Louise, till the question was repeated.

She could feel Achsah's eyes resting upon her with an eager, almost pleading gaze. It was evident that she was very much interested in the decision. Christie knew it made no difference in her own case. Her preference would have been for white, but whether she cast her vote for white or colored attire, her graduation dress was to be a present from the aunt whose namesake she was.

"I believe I will vote for colors," she said, after a moment's thoughtful pause, and there was a gleam of satisfaction in Achsah's eager face as she heard Christie's words.

"Grace, what do you say?"

"I have no preference," said Grace Davenport. "I will do whatever the majority of the

class decide to do. It doesn't make any difference to me."

"Grace is as unconcerned about her dress as if she was one of the lilies of the field," interposed Louise. "Well, I suppose if my wardrobe was inexhaustible, and I was comfortably certain that without any exertion upon my part the most stylish and becoming of garments would be duly provided, I could be unconcerned too. Unfortunately there is always a prospect before me of having to evolve my dresses out of nothingness, so I have to put my wits to work and do a good deal of toiling to make sure of them. Ella, let us hear from you now."

"My preference is decidedly for white," Ella answered. "I think it is so much more suitable than anything else could be."

Achsah's face clouded over with anxiety again, as Florence and Elsie also lent their voices in favor of white; and when Louise finally declared that she should determine as the majority had, Christie heard a sigh escape from the parted lips.

"White it is then," proclaimed Louise, who had been the self-appointed chairman of the meeting. "There is the bell. We hadn't a moment to spare, for Miss Denning never seems

to remember that we would like to have recess extended a little when we are discussing such weighty affairs as graduation dresses and other important matters."

"I don't intend to wear white, at any rate," interposed Achsah decisively. "I don't think it's a matter for the whole class to decide anyway, so I shall wear just what I like. It may be white and it may be yellow, but it will be my own choice."

"Well, Ishmael, you will lose your last chance of unanimity," as a look of annoyance gathered upon the faces of the other girls at what they considered Achsah's characteristic perverseness. "You've never agreed with us yet about anything, and so I suppose you feel a natural pride in preserving an unbroken record of contrariness. We can't compel you to do as the rest of us do, so if you prefer to be different, you may of course."

Christie at first shared the annoyance of the other girls; but as she pored over her Mental Philosophy she wondered whether there might not be some other reason for Achsah's persistence. Perhaps she had no white dress, and could not get one for the occasion which was so great an event in the eyes of the Maplewood girls and their friends. This thought softened

the vexation with which she had listened to Achsah's defiant refusal to yield to the will of the majority, and she determined to make an effort to win the confidence of the proud, reserved girl.

Her conscience smote her as she remembered that during the three years of their intercourse at the same school she had never showed Achsah any kindness, nor indeed had any of the other girls. True, Achsah had rather repelled than invited any advances on the part of her schoolmates, but her life must have been a very lonely one, unbrightened by any of the friendships which girls cherish so warmly during their school-days.

Perhaps this was one of the lives of which Aunt Patience had spoken to her, whose rough places she might make smoother by a little effort. Perhaps her "nexte thyng" might be to do something for Achsah Howe.

CHAPTER IV.

ACHSAH HOWE.

"MOTHER, may I ask Achsah Howe to take tea with us Saturday afternoon?" asked Christie, looking up from a brown study in which she had been indulging for some time.

"I have no objection," answered Mrs. Gilbert. "But why Achsah? Wouldn't you rather have some of the other girls?"

"Yes, I would rather," Christie answered, "but just now Achsah Howe looks to me like my 'nexte thyng'; and though it's rather late to begin, I should like to show her some little attention before she goes away."

"We'll try and give her a pleasant time to-morrow then," Mrs. Gilbert answered, and Christie knew that Achsah would be welcomed in the motherly way that made Mrs. Gilbert such a favorite among the young girls, and would have for a few hours a share in the home circle and home life.

"I wonder if any other girl ever had a mother who understood and entered into everything as you do, motherdie," she said, as she

took up her wide garden hat and left her comfortable perch in the hammock. "I'm going round to invite Achsah at once, so she may not make any other plan for to-morrow afternoon; though I think it is rather an unnecessary precaution, for I don't believe she has had a single invitation since she has been at the Institute. I am quite curious to know what she will say when I ask her."

It was not a long walk to the Institute, and Christie sauntered leisurely down the elm-shaded street, while her mother looked after the graceful girlish figure with loving pride, the pleasant smile which Christie's affectionate compliment had brought still lingering on her comely features.

"I wonder how I should feel if I were in Achsah's place," Christie reflected. "She must have such a lonely life, for all the rest of us girls have such a good time together, and she never has a share in any of the fun. Perhaps she can't help being queer, any more than she can help her dreadful clothes, though she never seems to mind wearing them. I wonder why she doesn't want to wear a white dress like the rest. I am going to try and get her to tell me to-morrow, and perhaps I may be able to help her a little in some way."

She had reached the Institute by this time and glanced up at Achsah's window to see if her schoolmate was visible.

"Is Miss Achsah in?" she asked the trim maid who was rubbing up the door-plate.

"Yes, Miss Christie, she's up in her room. Will you walk up, or shall I tell her you're here?"

"I'll just run up, thank you, Kitty," and Christie went lightly up the long flight, wondering if Achsah would be glad or sorry when the time came for her to leave the walls in which she had spent the last three years.

She tapped at Achsah's door, but there was no response, though she was sure she heard a noise within that sounded like a stifled sob.

She repeated her knock after a few moments, but still Achsah paid no heed, and Christie turned away feeling a little aggrieved. It was rather disappointing, when she had come upon an errand of kindness, to be refused admission, though of course Achsah did not know who was knocking at her door; but perhaps it was just as well. Very likely Achsah was quite contented with her isolation, and was not as much in need of friendship as Christie had fancied.

She had retraced her steps as far as the head of the stairs when the low sound of convul-

sive sobbing reached her again and made her pause.

"Perhaps Achsah is sick or in some great trouble," she thought. "I am going back to see if she will not let me in."

Swiftly returning to the door, she turned the handle and called gently,

"Achsah, may I come in?"

Through the partly opened door she caught a glimpse of Achsah, lying prone upon the bed in an attitude of distress, with her face buried in her pillow, while her slender figure was shaking with the sobs she could not wholly control.

She lifted a flushed, defiant face as Christie crossed the room without waiting for permission to enter.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly. "I should have answered when you knocked if I had wanted to see any one."

Christie's sympathies were too much aroused by the tear-stained face and quivering lips to allow her to be easily repelled by Achsah's evident annoyance.

"But I could n't go away and know you were in trouble," she answered, sitting down on the edge of the bed and taking Achsah's unwilling hand in her own. "Wont you let me help you in some way, or at least share in your trouble?"

"It isn't anything that you could possibly understand," Achsah answered coldly. "I am not in the habit of going to any one for help or sympathy when I am in trouble. I only want to be let alone."

Christie was silent for a few moments. She did not feel hurt or angry, but she thought perhaps Achsah would really rather be left alone with her trouble, whatever it was. While she sat in thought her eyes fell upon an old silk dress that had evidently been taken from the paper wrappings that were strewed beside it on the floor.

It was a vivid green, soiled and faded, with lace trimmings that were ragged in places, and decidedly the worse for hard wear. Could this dress have anything to do with Achsah's grief? She would make another effort to gain her confidence before she left her.

"Achsah," she said gently, with a warmer clasp of the hand that lay limply in her own, "if you really want me to go away, I will, of course, but I wish you would treat me as a friend. I know I don't deserve your confidence, for I haven't been very thoughtful of your happiness the years we have been together here; but I want to make up for it now if you will let me. Can't you trust me, dear, and let me help

you if I can in any way? I can't bear to go away and leave you so unhappy."

Achsah tried to harden her heart and not yield to Christie's pleading; but for once, reserved as she was, it seemed as if her burden was too heavy to be borne alone, and she longed to have some sympathy. She had let herself become thoroughly embittered against her schoolmates because they had been indifferent to her, forgetting that it is love that begets love, and the cloak of defiant reserve in which she had wrapped herself would have isolated any one of the others quite as completely as it had isolated her.

She had envied Christie the love which all her schoolmates gave her so freely, and she had secretly admired the tact and thoughtful courtesy in which Christie never failed.

To have Christie for a friend had been one of the longings which she had always sternly repressed as too unattainable to be cherished; yet here was this same Christie, notwithstanding all her rebuffs, pleading to be allowed to comfort her.

She tried to make herself believe that it was only idle curiosity that prompted the interest; but she knew better, and, after a short struggle with her pride, she surrendered to the charm of Christie's affectionate solicitude.

"I am so perfectly discouraged," she said, with a quiver in her voice. "I don't want you to think that I am babyish enough to mind just this one disappointment so much, but it is just the climax. I did think I was going to have a nice graduating dress, but look at it," and with a gesture of disdain she indicated the garment on the floor.

"Perhaps you can fix it over in some way so it will look better," suggested Christie, trying to comfort her, although she could not imagine any way herself in which the dress could be made fit for anything but the rag-bag.

Achsa shook her head. "No, there is no hope of its ever being made fit to wear," she said despondingly. "I shall have to wear one of my school dresses and be a disgrace to you all."

Christie was silent. She wanted to say something comforting with all her heart, but she felt that it would be impossible to urge Achsa to content herself with the green silk, or to assure her that one of her plain, unbecoming school dresses would be a suitable dress in which to graduate. "Talk it over with mother; she will know just what to do; she always does," she exclaimed, feeling that if there was any way out of the perplexity her mother would certainly

be able to suggest it. "I came over to ask you if you would n't spend to-morrow afternoon with us and stay to tea; but if you could come now and stay all night it would be ever so much better. You don't know what a mother I've got, Achsah; I tell her she must have a magician's wand, for she can always straighten out every tangle and make things come out just the way you want them, and I know she will tell us just what to do about your dress. You would n't mind telling her about it, would you, dear? Now let me bathe your forehead a few minutes, for it is so hot I know you have been crying yourself into a headache, and then when you feel rested we will go over home."

It was a luxury to lonely, unloved Achsah to lie still with closed eyes and feel Christie's soft wet fingers stroking her throbbing head. She involuntarily shared her schoolmate's belief that the question of her graduation dress would be satisfactorily settled when Mrs. Gilbert took it up, and the new sense of sympathy comforted her for the disappointment which had seemed too bitter to bear but a little while ago.

"I hope you don't think I am a baby to cry my eyes out about such a foolish thing as a dress," she said apologetically; "but I had

really let myself believe that I was going to look like the rest of you for once, and so when this thing came a little while ago, I could n't help giving up to my disappointment. One reason why I was so anxious that the class should vote in favor of colors was that I knew I could not have a white dress. Of course the girls thought I was just ugly about it, and I don't blame them. I knew it did seem so, but I could n't help it. I know I have seemed ugly and hateful so often, and I do n't wonder Louise calls me Ishmael, but you do n't know how hard everything has been for me, Christie."

"I do n't wonder you were disappointed about your dress, and you were n't a bit babyish to cry about it," Christie said comfortingly, beginning to realize that many of Achsah's peculiarities might have been the result of circumstances rather than the naturally disagreeable disposition with which she had been generally accredited.

"I should like to tell you why I have had to dress so differently from all the rest of you," said Achsah, after a short silence. "Perhaps you do n't want to be bothered with my confidences though."

"I should like to hear anything that you are willing to tell me, dear," Christie answered,

glad that Achsah was willing to lay aside her usual reserve.

"I shall have to begin ten years back," said Achsah, "or you will not understand everything. My father was a home missionary out West, and I can remember well how happy the first seven years of my life were. My mother must have been such a lovely woman, for I never remember her as anything but sweet and patient, and sometimes I can almost fancy now that I feel her arms around me. My father was a very talented man, for I have heard since that he might have been the pastor of a large city church if he had not felt that it was his duty to go out to the frontier; and I never dare let myself think how different my life might have been if they had lived. I remember the day when father and mother were both taken away from me. It was a bitterly cold day, and father was sent for to the home of a dying child. Mother was ill, and she was afraid to have him go out in the storm. She grew anxious when evening came and the storm increased, and when the night wore away without bringing him, she was nearly wild with anxiety. In the morning he was brought home. He had lost his way and had perished with his horse in the snow. If mother had been well perhaps she could have





borne the terrible shock, but three days afterward, when my father was buried, my mother and my tiny baby sister were laid beside him."

Christie's eyes filled with sympathetic tears as Achsah's lips quivered.

"There was but one home open to me, and I suppose I ought to have been very grateful that I was not left entirely dependent upon the charity of strangers. My father's half sister sent for me and let me share her home for my father's sake, though she always made me feel that I was unwelcome and merely tolerated because there was nothing else to be done with me. She had been very kind to my father in her grim, unloving way, and as she was twenty years his senior she had in many respects taken the place of the mother he had lost when he was a baby. She had never had any sympathy with his love of study, and had done everything in her power to dissuade him from taking a college course. She never forgave him for not taking his father's place upon the farm, and when I came under her care she determined that I at least should be ruled by her, and not have any more education than she thought was necessary. Young as I was, I realized that I must have an education if I was ever to make my life any different from the narrow, self-centred life of the old farmhouse, and

I would study in spite of all discouragements. When I had learned all that I could at the district school, I begged her to let me go away somewhere and finish my education, promising to repay with interest all that it would cost her as soon as I was fitted to teach. It was a long time before she would listen to me at all; but at last, when she found that I was perfectly determined to learn more, and would never be satisfied with a life of drudgery in the farmhouse, she told me that my father had left a few hundred dollars which she had never touched, and if I chose to 'waste it,' as she expressed it, upon an education, I might; but I needn't expect any help from her. It was enough for her to give me my time when she might have reasonably expected me to be of some assistance to her, after all the years I had been too young to be of use.

"I was too glad of her consent to mind how grudgingly it had been given. I found I had just enough money to enable me to graduate here, if I could complete the course in three years; but then the question of clothing came up. I had my mother's dresses and the contents of a missionary-box which had been received a few weeks before my father's death. I found I could wear the clothes with very little alteration, though I could see that even in that little coun-

try place among the hills they looked queer and old fashioned, and I knew they would be very different from every one else's when I came here. I thought I would be happy in spite of my clothes when I should really begin my studies here, but I found I was not as independent as I had thought I was. The first week I felt as if I must run away and hide myself somewhere whenever I felt the girls looking at me, and it was so hard to feel that I was shut away from you all because I was so queer and old fashioned. Even my name had to be so ugly and different from every one else's. Father had named me for Aunt Achsah, and I suppose he never realized how I would hate such a name when I grew old enough to know how ugly it was. But it has all been so hard. You don't know how I have just *ached* sometimes for a pretty name and clothes that were like other people's."

"Oh, Achsah, if I had only known all this before!" Christie exclaimed, with a heart-ache at the thought of the many little kindnesses she had left undone that might have made Achsah feel less desolate and alone. She had no real unkindness with which to reproach herself; but these undone things rose up as reproachfully before her as if they had been things committed.

"I was too proud to let any one see how

much I minded," Achsah went on, "and so I acted as if I did not care for any one's opinion of either myself or my clothes, and the more I cared the more independently I tried to act; but it has been hard sometimes. I knew I could never have any friends, and so I tried to make myself believe I did not want any; and I have been hateful and disagreeable, so that no one would guess how lonely and miserable I was.

"But I have n't told you about my dress yet," she continued. "I found I had n't anything that would do at all to wear at Commencement, so I wrote to Aunt Achsah and asked her if she would help me just this once and give me a graduating dress. I do not know whether she meant to disappoint me so dreadfully or not, or whether she really did n't know what a looking thing this is; but she wrote me that she would send me a silk dress that her sister had been married in, and she thought with a little alteration it might do nicely. So I really believed it would be something that could be made to look well; and when it came and I saw what a shabby old thing it was, it seemed as if I could n't bear the disappointment on the top of all the rest."

"I don't wonder you were disappointed," said Christie, with warm sympathy and a great admiration in her heart for a girl who had fought

against so many difficulties in her determination to win an education. "Don't shed another tear over it, Achsah," she pleaded, as Achsah's eyes filled again when she looked at the forlorn heap of faded finery. "Mother will fix things all right somehow, I am sure, and we'll go and tell her all about it."

"You are so kind," said Achsah gratefully. "Are you sure she won't think it is too much trouble?"

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Christie. "You don't know how lovely she is. She would rather straighten out troubles for other people than have a good time herself, I believe; and she's always willing to do anything for my friends."

A flush of pleasure came to Achsah's cheeks as she heard herself so naturally classed among Christie's friends.

"Now we will wrap the dress up and take it home to show mother," Christie said. "I will fold it up while you are fixing your hair, and then we will start at once, so we will have an hour or so before tea-time. I don't believe you will have any trouble about getting permission to go."

Fifteen minutes later the girls were walking up the broad elm-shaded street towards Christie's home, Achsah's heart lighter than it had been for many a day.

CHAPTER V.

THE DRESS PROBLEM.

It was a very easy thing for Christie to be as cordial and pleasant to Achsah as to any of the other girls, now that her sympathies had been aroused, and the remembrance of past neglect of her schoolmate's happiness made her doubly anxious to atone for it by any kindness that she could show her.

When they reached the pretty vine-covered cottage, Christie took Achsah up stairs to the cosey little room that was her own.

"What a beautiful room!" exclaimed Achsah, as her eyes wandered admiringly about the dainty blue-tinted nest.

"Isn't it pretty!" said Christie, pleased with Achsah's undisguised admiration. "Mother always gives me something pretty for this room when she wants to make me a present, and I have almost everything I want for it now. Father gives me a great many books, and I begin to feel as if I owned quite a library."

She drew aside the embroidered curtains that hung before a pretty low bookcase, and showed

the well-filled shelves with evident pride. They were a collection of books that any girl might be glad to own and to number among her friends, and perhaps the hours spent over their pages had had as large a share in Christie's education as the hours spent over school books.

Christie's ambitions and ideals had been formed as she lingered over the inspiring words of poets who set the duties of life to grand music, or authors who gleaned only the pure and the true to offer to their readers; and she cherished her books as if they were living, sympathetic friends.

Achsah's companions had always been her books, and kneeling down before Christie's book-case she touched the volumes almost affectionately, expressing her delight when she met with some favorite author and questioning Christie about the contents of some others with which she was not familiar.

Before many minutes had passed Christie began to realize that she had been the loser in not making Achsah's acquaintance before, she shared so many of Christie's tastes and had so many bright original ideas which she was not slow to express when she felt sure of sympathy.

Christie left her looking over the books while

she went down stairs to acquaint her mother with the arrival of her guest.

"Motherdie, wont you plan something nice about her graduation dress?" she asked coaxingly, winding her arms about her mother's neck. "I really believe I care more about her dress than I do my own, for I always have everything I care for, and she has never had anything. She is to be the class valedictorian too, and it would be a shame for her to have to wear one of her shabby old school dresses; and that hideous green silk is quite out of the question, though I didn't like to discourage her by telling her so."

Mrs. Gilbert's motherly sympathies were at once enlisted in the young girl's behalf, as Christie told her the story of Achsah's life and her determined struggle for an education; and she promised Christie willingly that in some way the dress problem should be solved satisfactorily.

"She was so lonely and discouraged that I could n't help bringing her home with me this afternoon," explained Christie. "You don't mind, do you, mother?"

"Of course not, dear; I am glad you did," Mrs. Gilbert answered cordially. "I'll come up to your room and see her in a few minutes,

and then we will have a chat about her dress."

Achsah had often seen Mrs. Gilbert and admired her motherly face and pleasant manners, but she had never spoken to her before, and she was surprised and touched at her warm welcome and affectionate greeting. She felt at home with her at once, and lost the air of defiant shyness which rendered her so unprepossessing to strangers.

"Christie is quite as much interested in your graduating dress as she is in her own," Mrs. Gilbert remarked presently; "and I know it is fully as important a subject to you seniors as your essays and diplomas. I hope you are going to let me have a little share in yours too, in the way of advice at least. Christie's is to be a present from her aunt, so I am defrauded of my proper share of responsibility as far as she is concerned."

"You are so kind, Mrs. Gilbert," responded Achsah gratefully, beginning to undo the package in which the obnoxious green silk was folded away. "I am in perfect despair over this myself, and I can't imagine any way in which it could be transformed into a presentable dress. It is so very unbecoming, to begin with, although my dresses always are, for that matter."

It would have been hard to find any color more unbecoming to Achsah's dark olive skin than the intense green, and Mrs. Gilbert mentally decided that it would never do as soon as Achsah held it up against her face.

"If there was only time enough, you might have it dyed and entirely made over," she remarked. "It is a good quality; those old-fashioned silks used to be made to wear instead of to sell, and you could have a serviceable dark silk that would wear for a long time. That is out of the question just now though, for there is not time to send it to the dyer's and get it back again before Commencement. I will carry it off to my room, if you will let me, and see if I can't plan something that will please you; and in the meantime you and Christie can put it out of your heads and have a pleasant visit together."

It was with a sense of relief that Achsah saw the green silk disappear, and then she gave herself up to the full enjoyment of Christie's graceful hospitality. She forgot her old-fashioned, ill-fitting dress and her self-consciousness, and proved that she could be a very pleasant companion.

The two girls spent a pleasant hour together in Christie's room, looking at and discussing the

pretty girlish belongings with which it was filled, and then Achsah leaned luxuriously back in the little rocking-chair and let her eyes feast themselves on the pretty picture that was framed in by the open window.

First the elms with their leafy arms entwined as they had been for the last half-century, their breeze-kissed leaves making a quivering arabesque of green through which the translucent blue of the summer sky shimmered. An oval opening in the branches showed the broad blue river tranquilly rippling along, an active little tug boat panting and puffing as it drew a fleet of heavy barges against the tide.

"How beautiful it is!" Achsah said at last, with a little sigh of content, the quiet peacefulness of the summer afternoon pervading her with its restfulness.

"I never get tired of my little glimpse of the river," Christie returned. "I am going to leave you to enjoy it a little while, Achsah, while I go and see if mother wants me for anything."

She sought her mother's room at once, eager to know how she was going to solve the dress problem which seemed such a hopeless one to the two girls.

"Did you ever see anything so dreadful, mother!" Christie exclaimed, as she held up the

green silk, which seemed more vivid and unpromising than ever in its hue as the afternoon sunshine fell upon it.

Mrs. Gilbert smiled at Christie's disdain. "I remember very well, dear, when that would have been considered a beautiful dress, and a pair of kid gloves to match would have been the height of fashion. I must admit though that it is rather hopeless material from which to plan anything that will be suitable for Commencement night. It is a pity Achsah can't wear a white dress like the rest of the class. I have just been trying to see if I could n't manage to contrive one for her, but I am afraid I can't. After I lay aside the money for your trip with your cousins next month, I have not any extra funds to fall back upon; and I do not want to ask your father for any more, for I know he can't spare it."

Christie was silent for a time and a shadow of disappointment dimmed the eager brightness which had been upon her face all the afternoon.

She played with the torn lace upon the old dress with restless fingers, and looked over the persistently green folds out to the no less green leaves of the elms, with a flitting query under her other thoughts why one should be so ugly and the other so beautiful.

"Nexts are just like the links in a chain,

aren't they, mother?" she said at last. "One thing leads right on to another. If you take up one 'next' another comes right to your hand, and you can't get past it without taking it up. I took up one 'next,' and now that I am almost past it another 'next' is coming that I don't like quite as well."

"Duties are always linked together," Mrs. Gilbert answered, watching Christie's thoughtful face, while the bright needles flashed to and fro in her fingers. "Sometimes we drop a link, and then we make mistakes; but if we followed straight on we could not go wrong. What is your 'next' now, dearie?"

"Let me think about it before I tell even you, mother," Christie answered, and she curled herself up in the broad low window-seat that was one of the charms of 'mother's room,' and looked up at the drifting clouds with a thoughtful little wrinkle in the fair girlish forehead.

It was no sacrifice to Christie to do things which seemed rarely generous, for nothing ever gave her greater happiness than to delight another's heart with some wished-for possession. She shrank, too, from praise for thoughtfulness and tact, because she had an instinctive consciousness that she did not deserve it.

There was danger that Christie's sensitive-

ness about hurting the feelings of others might some day unconsciously become insincerity, for from babyhood she had been almost morbidly fearful of wounding another by some thoughtless remark.

Christie often smiled now over one little incident of her childhood. She was attending a school for little children where all the scholars were between six and eight years old, with the exception of a large colored girl, who brought one of the children to school every day and remained with her little charge until it was time to take her home again.

Christie had never seen a colored person before, and she pitied this girl from the depths of her childish heart for the dark skin which made her so conspicuous. She showed Debby many a little kindness, and never made any allusion to the black skin and woolly hair which many of the other children commented freely upon.

"I should feel so dreadfully, if I was black, that I would never want any one to speak about it," she thought to herself, regarding poor Debby with pitying eyes.

One day when Christie was reciting in the little geography class, the teacher asked her, "What sort of people are the inhabitants of Africa?"

Much to her surprise, for Christie usually had her lessons carefully prepared, the child remained silent, though a crimson flush overspread her face.

"Think a minute, Christie; I am sure you know," the teacher said encouragingly, but Christie's lips never moved.

"Don't you know, dear?" asked the teacher, seeing the little girl's distress. "I think you can tell me. What color are the people who live in Africa?"

Christie's heart swelled and tears shone in her eyes. Oh, could n't Miss Carpenter understand why she did not answer! Of course she knew, but how could she tell with Debby looking at her from her seat in the corner, a friendly smile on her shining black face and her bright eyes gleaming with interest. If she could only describe the Africans without hurting Debby's feelings, as she surely must by mentioning their color and their tightly curled hair! but that was impossible, so she hid her face behind a corner of her little white apron and wept softly, while Miss Carpenter passed the question.

"They look like Debby," responded the next child. "They are black, with kinky hair," and behind Christie's apron tears of sympathy for Debby's hurt feelings mingled with the

tears that fell for her supposed failure in her lesson.

When all the children had gone out to play at recess, Miss Carpenter called the tearful little girl to her and said gently,

"Christie, could n't you tell me about the people that live in Africa?"

"Yes'm," came in smothered tones from behind the white apron.

"Why did n't you then?" the teacher asked.

"I was afraid it would make Debby feel bad," Christie answered, "and I know she felt dreadful when Carrie said they were black and their hair kinked. Poor Debby, she can't help being black, and it must make her feel so dreadful when people notice it."

The tears were falling faster for Debby now than for herself, for she did not mind losing her place in the class, as long as Miss Carpenter knew all about it.

Christie had never outgrown this extreme sensitiveness about other people's feelings, and it cost her a great effort ever to say anything that might hurt another in any way.

Generosity was another trait in her character, so marked that it was often necessary for her mother to curb her when she was too little to understand what was her own to give and what

belonged to her parents. Once the Sunday's dinner had been placed by the generous little hands in a beggar's basket, and oftentimes the child had come in from her play with some article of clothing missing which she had given to a "poor itty beggar girl."

As Christie grew older she learned discretion in her giving, but she always felt it to be a great pleasure to gratify any friend's wishes, at whatever cost it might be to herself. It was indeed a great sacrifice that she would consider as such, if a friend's happiness was in question. Impulsively generous, it gave her more pleasure to gratify her impulses than to carry out any pre-conceived plan for her own gratification.

Her mother's words concerning Achsah's dress had suggested a plan to her mind, but for once the cost seemed so great that she hesitated. This pleasant summer trip with her cousins had been something to which she had looked forward with eager anticipation for nearly a year, and she had been away from home so little that it seemed a greater treat to her than it might have appeared to many girls.

If she could only give this trip up, and use the money to procure a pretty white dress for Achsah for Commencement night! But much as she longed to make her schoolmate happy,

thoughts of self could not be entirely put aside.

"If it was anything but that!" she said to herself again and again, as she revolved the matter in her own mind.

"Well?" asked her mother inquiringly at last, as Christie moved restlessly from her comfortable nook.

"I think I've made up my mind to my 'next,'" Christie answered. "I didn't want to just at first, but if I don't, it will spoil my other nice time anyway, for my troublesome conscience will persist in calling me selfish."

"What is it?"

"I want to give up my trip with Aunt Florence, if you are willing, and ask father to give me the money instead; then I want you to be the loveliest mother in the world, and spend it for Achsah just as you would for me, in getting her a real pretty white dress and all the little fixings to go with it, so that she will have just one happy time to remember in her schooldays anyway. I believe I shall feel nearly as bad as she does, if she has to wear one of her dowdy old school dresses, and it would be a shame for her to have to look so when she is the brightest girl in the class. I shall really enjoy doing this more than going with Aunt Florence, though I

had to weigh everything on both sides very carefully to really make up my mind."

"Are you sure you have counted the cost?" asked her mother, smiling down into the earnest face.

"Yes; this is n't a rash impulse, mother; I've spent at least ten minutes in serious thought, and you know that is long and prudent deliberation for me. It wont spoil Aunt Florence's party if I don't go, for she will take Cousin Emily in my place, and I shall be happy at home here with you."

"And I shall enjoy having my Christie to myself a while after this busy school year is over," her mother answered. "I wont say a word to dissuade you from your plan, darling, for I know your generous heart so well that I think Achsah's happiness will quite make up to you for your disappointment."

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTIE'S PLAN.

CHRISTIE went back to her room feeling so delighted at the satisfactory solution of the problem of Achsah's graduating dress, that she quite forgot to think of the sacrifice that it was to cost.

She found her guest still luxuriating in the comfortable low chair, with her eyes fixed upon the river and an abstracted look upon her face.

"Did you think I had quite run away and left you?" asked Christie merrily, as Achsah started from her reverie at her friend's entrance. "Well, it's just as I told you it would be. You are going to have a lovely dress for Commencement after all."

"How?" queried Achsah in amazement, her face reflecting the smile which illumined Christie's features.

"I'll tell you when we go to bed," Christie answered. "I want to have something nice to talk about then, and in the meantime you must take it on faith. Now it is almost time for the tea-bell to ring, and we must be getting ready.

May I do your hair? I flatter myself I have a gift that way, and I am always anxious to try my skill on the heads of any of my friends who will trust themselves in my hands."

Achsah was only too willing, and Christie took out the hairpins which fastened the hard, ungraceful knot, and let the long silky hair flow in waves over Achsah's shoulders till it rippled down to her waist.

"You have such beautiful hair!" Christie exclaimed admiringly as she brushed it. "May I fix it any way I like? I don't think you make half enough of it. If I had such hair I should n't twist it into a plain little knot, but I should make loose coils of it so every hair would show to advantage. You aren't half vain enough, Achsah."

"I wish you would show me some pretty way to arrange it," Achsah said, her face brightening at Christie's words. "I never thought about doing it becomingly, but I just twisted it up out of the way anyhow."

Christie was enough of an artist to know how to arrange the soft shining coils to bring out their beauty to the best advantage, and at the same time to make the luxuriant hair becoming to the small face with its delicate features. She brushed forward the short wavy locks about the

low forehead which Achsah had always fastened back, and the effect was quite as becoming as she had thought it would be. "Now let me dress you up a little more, Achsah," she exclaimed, delighted with the result of her labor; and unfastening the stiff linen band about Achsah's neck, she replaced it with a soft, cream-tinted ruching, and fastened a glowing Jacqueminot rose at the throat.

"There, now look at yourself!" she exclaimed, and Achsah gazed with girlish pleasure at the reflection in the glass. It was wonderful how the change in the arrangement of her hair had altered the expression of her face. It was not the repellant image that had looked at her every morning from the glass in her little room at the Institute that she saw smiling at her from Christie's mirror. Her face was not as round and rosy as Christie's, and it lacked the dimples and animation that she admired so much in her schoolmate; but it was no less attractive, with the clear olive skin flushed a little just now with unusual color, her dark eyes lustrous with feeling, and a pleased smile upon her lips.

A stranger would have said that Achsah's face was the more intellectual of the two, and the coil of hair crowning the small, well-poised head gave her a queenly air that marked her

with a certain individuality that Christie lacked.

Christie had barely time to hastily brush her own hair and rearrange it, and slip into a fresh white dress, before the tea-bell rang and it was time to take her guest down stairs.

More than once during the next hour she looked at Achsah in wonder. The girl was a new revelation to her. The stiffness and defiance were gone, and she talked so well and readily that Mr. Gilbert was evidently very much pleased with his young guest and did his best to draw her out. Achsah felt that she looked her best, and she forgot her ill-fitting dress and everything that usually made her self-conscious and awkward, while she enjoyed the charm of this pleasant home circle where she was so cordially made to feel herself a welcome guest.

She responded readily to the kindness with which she was treated, and did not look, as was her wont, for slights or criticism. Even Christie had no idea of the pleasure that evening was to Achsah, although she fancied that she could imagine it, knowing as she did how lonely and isolated her schoolmate had been ever since her arrival at the Institute.

When the two girls went up to bed at last Achsah's face was fairly glowing with pleasure

and animation, and she had laughed merrily several times in a way that Christie would have believed impossible a few hours before.

She realized that the reserve and defiance had not been so much Achsah's real self as they had been assumed to hide her loneliness and heart-ache. With all her heart she wished that she had begun before to smooth the rough places in this life, which had had so little of the pleasure of girlhood in it; but it comforted her a little for her previous neglect to think of the pleasure she had in store for Achsah.

The girls lingered long over their toilet—leisurely brushing their hair and preparing for the night, Achsah loath to lose a moment of this delightful evening by letting sleep encroach upon it. When they were ready for bed at last, and Christie put out the lamp, the soft moonlight streamed in through the window and made the room almost as light as day.

Achsah was very quiet for a little while after the dark head and the fair one were nestled side by side upon the pillow. She was thinking how lovely a thing it must be to really *belong* in a home like this and have a share in the love which pervaded it. The loving intercourse, the interest and sympathy which Christie could claim so freely, the little caresses which passed

as a matter of course between mother and daughter, seemed like the greatest happiness in the world to heart-hungry Achsah, who had borne all her girlish troubles alone and had known no sympathy in her ambition to be a student. She did not realize that she had shut herself away from much companionship that she might have had, by her own manner and sharp speech, and she thought half enviously that it was unjust that Christie should have everything while she had nothing. But the remembrance of Christie's kindness banished all this envy from her longing for a home, and her grateful heart overflowed with affection for her new friend.

"Now I suppose you want to know about the dress," Christie said, as they settled themselves for one of the chats that girls delight in after they are in bed.

"Yes; I can't quite understand how your mother could plan anything nice for me, wonderful as she is," Achsah returned.

"I am a little afraid that perhaps you won't like the plan," said Christie, feeling suddenly shy about broaching her project to Achsah, lest she should wound her pride.

"I am sure I shall like anything that your mother suggests," Achsah returned, with perfect confidence in Mrs. Gilbert's judgment.

"But this is my plan quite as much as mother's," Christie explained. "Oh, dear, I am just crazy to tell you all about it, only I shall be so dreadfully disappointed if you are not pleased with it too. I give you warning, Achsah, I shall be very much hurt if you don't agree to it. Will you promise beforehand not to be the least bit hurt at anything I propose?"

"I will promise you anything," Achsah answered warmly.

"Now remember that, for I am going to believe it and tell you all about my plan without being a bit afraid that you will be vexed with me," Christie went on. "Achsah, I am going to ask you to let me do just as I would if you were my sister, or as I am sure you would do for me if I were in your place and you in mine. It shall be a secret between ourselves, and no one else shall know a word about it except mother, and you don't mind her knowing, of course. I shall have some money that I can use for anything that I want to, and I have just set my heart upon getting you a lovely white dress, and all the pretty little dainty fixings that auntie is going to send me. Now, Achsah, don't say no, for I am resolved to carry out my plan, and I shall think you don't want to be friends with me if you refuse. It is the first favor I have ever

asked of you, so I know you will say yes to it. Why, Achsah, what is the matter? Have I hurt your feelings, dear? You promised me you would n't be hurt or offended."

Achsah had buried her face in the pillow and was weeping, and Christie raised herself upon her elbow and looked at her in silent dismay.

"Now I have told you about it so awkwardly that I have hurt your feelings," Christie said, her own eyes beginning to fill. "I am so sorry, Achsah; wont you take it just the way I meant it, for it will spoil everything for me to think that I have made you feel bad. Please don't cry," and she nestled her face close to Achsah's tear-wet cheek.

"It is n't that I feel hurt," Achsah said, trying to control her voice. "But you are so good. Of course I must n't let you do it, but it is so lovely in you to care enough about me to be willing to do so much to have me look as nice as any of the rest, that indeed I shall not feel bitter now even if I have to wear that old green silk. I believe it was more because I felt as if nobody cared that I minded it so much before. You have so many to care about you, Christie, that you can't imagine what it feels like to know that nothing that you have or do is of any consequence to any one but yourself."

"You must never feel that way again," Christie answered, with a loving pressure of the hand that sought her own. "I always thought you did not care to be friends with any of us; but if I had only known you before as I do now, we would have been friends long ago. Now you are going to let me be happy over your graduating dress, are n't you? for you do n't know what a disappointment it will be to me if you do n't let me have my way about it."

But Achsah steadfastly refused for some time to hear of such a thing as accepting Christie's generosity, and it was only when she realized that her refusal was really wounding and disappointing her friend that she yielded.

Christie was so enthusiastic over the dress that she was eager to discuss it with Achsah, and various styles and trimmings were talked over by the two girls, till Mrs. Gilbert tapped upon their door.

"Christie! You girls must stop talking and go to sleep. It is after eleven o'clock."

With an exchange of good nights they went to sleep, Achsah's heart warm with a new feeling of affection and gratitude, while Christie wondered how this "nexte thyng" could ever have seemed hard to do.

Early the next morning Christie sought her

father and asked his consent to give up the proposed trip with her aunt and cousins.

"What a changeable little weather-cock it is," her father answered, pinching her cheek playfully. "Here you have been talking and planning about this wonderful trip for months, and now all at once you want to give it up. Well, I'm perfectly willing, puss, for it would be lonely without you; but you will have to make your peace with your aunt Florence."

"If I don't go, father, would you mind giving me the money that the trip would cost, or a part of it at least?" Christie asked rather shyly.

Her father looked up inquiringly.

"Are n't you growing mercenary, daughter?" he asked good humoredly. "Seems to me that fifty dollars is quite a large amount of pin money for you to have all at once. What mighty project have you on hand?"

"Would you mind if I didn't tell you?" Christie asked. "Mother knows, and she approves of it, but it is somebody else's secret besides my own, so I would rather not say anything more about it."

"If mother knows, I'm perfectly satisfied," her father answered. "Here it is, girlie, and I hope you'll enjoy every cent of it."

Christie felt very rich as she deposited the

new crisp bill in her portemonnaie, which had never held such an accumulation of wealth before.

"Mother, could n't we go to the city to-day and get the dress?" she asked, when she found her mother in the dining-room giving the last dainty touches to the carefully appointed table.

Mrs. Gilbert paused to consider the programme she had already mapped out for the day.

"I think we must," she said. "There is so little time before Commencement that we cannot afford to lose a day, and I will make the dress, Christie. I want to have that part in your plan, and then no one beside ourselves need know anything about it. You two girls might go in on the nine o'clock train and look around, and I will meet you two hours later and help you decide. How do you like that plan?"

"Nothing could be better, you best of mothers!" Christie exclaimed joyfully, giving her a loving hug that expressed all the thanks that she did not put into words.

The city was only an hour's ride from the pretty village of Weston, but Achsah had never been in it since the day she passed through it on her way to Maplewood Institute, and it was with a glow of pleasurable excitement that she heard the plan for the day.

"I can hardly believe that it was only yesterday that I was so perfectly wretched," she said to Christie, when they were seated in the train and moving out of the station. "I felt as if it was of no use to try any more; that I could n't possibly get along without a friend in the world; and now I am happier than I have been for years."

"I am so glad that I was part of the plan for making you happier," Christie said earnestly, feeling the blessedness of the ministry of helpfulness as she listened to Achsah's words.

Her own life was so sheltered by love and care that she delighted in the thought that she could reflect a little of its sunshine into a less favored life, and she was almost more happy than Achsah herself.

The two girls were so absorbed in conversation that they did not notice who their neighbors were upon the ferry-boat until they had nearly crossed the river.

"Oh, Achsah, look at this poor woman," Christie whispered; and both the girls regarded the passenger who sat on Christie's right with pitying curiosity.

She was a small, frail-looking woman, with a thin, haggard face, which wore an expression of hopeless misery. Her features were pinched with illness and want, and dark rings encircled

her eyes. Her clothes, though clean, were almost too old and worn to hold together, and the little bundle that she held in her arms so tenderly that the girls knew it must be a baby, was bundled up in a piece of coarse sackings.

As the girls looked at the sorrowful face of the mother a feeble little wail issued from the bundle, and she hushed it tenderly, while two great tears that had been gathering in her eyes rolled slowly down her sunken cheeks.

"Is your baby sick?" asked Christie, her heart overflowing with sympathy for the poor woman.

The mother evidently understood the question, but her speech was so broken that it was scarcely intelligible to the girls.

"He sick in his eyes," she said, drawing the covering from the baby's head and showing them the bandaged eyes. "He three week old. Doctor say me take him every day to hospital, perhaps he see. Doctor hurt him. He cry very much."

"But surely you do not take him every day yourself! You are not well enough," Christie exclaimed.

"Me take him yesterday, to-day," explained the woman. "Doctor say he must go every day, or he no see."

The boat had reached the slip and the passengers were crowding towards the deck.

Christie opened her purse and took out a silver coin.

"I am so sorry for your poor little baby," she said gently; "I hope he will soon be better. Will you use this for him in any way you like?"

The mother's face brightened as she took the coin.

"Tank you," she said gratefully, and in another moment the crowd had swept the girls along, and they had left the poor woman with her pitiful little burden to wait till the confusion was over before they left the boat.

"I never saw such a sorrowful face as that poor woman's was before you spoke to her, Christie," said Achsah. "Poor little thing, she looked so ill and feeble; and the baby, puny as it was, seemed too much of a weight for her. How much suffering there is in the world that we don't know anything about. I do envy you, Christie; you always know how to make people happier as soon as you see they are in trouble, and I wish I could live just such a life as yours. You make sunshine for everybody."

"Oh, Achsah, don't say that!" Christie said earnestly. "You don't know me when you talk that way, for indeed I don't deserve to have

such things said about me. Until very lately I have n't tried at all to do the little things that I could to make people happier, but have been planning magnificent air castles of which I could never even lay the foundations. Yet I do want to be of use and to know that some one is happier for my having lived; but I am only just beginning to learn that the way to accomplish this is to 'doe ye nexte thynges.' It was the last lesson I ever learned from dear Aunt Patience, and I hope I shall remember it, and not go back to discontented dreams of what I might be and do if I was talented, intellectual, and rich. I don't mean to despise the little things that come in my way just because they are not grand opportunities; but it is hard sometimes to realize that these little things are just as true service as if they were greater and seemed to be more worth the doing."

CHAPTER VII.

"YE NEXTE THYNGE."

IN the rush for seats in the crowded street-cars Achsah had no opportunity to reply to Christie's words, but she looked at her companion's earnest face in surprised wonder. Did Christie really mean all that she said? Were the few verses she had read so simply and naturally from her Bible the night before really a guide to her in her actions and plans?

Not that Achsah had ever brought herself to believe that religion was altogether a pretence. The father who had laid down his life on the frontier, the mother who had so gladly undergone all the privations and trials of a missionary life that they might carry the gospel tidings, were a memory that forbade her to speak or think lightly of what they held so dear; but looking for inconsistencies with keen eyes, she condemned failures in duty as insincerity, and excused herself for her indifference to religion on the plea of others' faults. It was a mistake that older and wiser people than Achsah often make, and she had yet to learn that it was a

question that she must settle as absolutely alone as if there was no other being in the universe.

It was a new thing for her to hear a young girl of her own age speak as if she really believed in all that she professed, and wanted to live her life so as best to glorify her Master.

It was a pleasant morning that followed as the girls turned over soft white fabrics and sheer lawns and looked at laces and ribbons. It was the first taste of real girlish pleasure in the matter of the selection of a dress that Achsah had ever had, and she gave herself up to the delights of the occasion as entirely as did Christie.

They enjoyed themselves even more when, two hours later, Mrs. Gilbert joined them, for she so fully understood and sympathized with young girls that they never felt her presence to be any restraint.

After a busy hour of shopping, in which the important dress with all its accessories was finally purchased, Mrs. Gilbert took the girls to a lunch room, where they were glad to rest and cool off as they discussed their refreshments.

Christie's thoughts, by some subtle chain of association, wandered back to the poor woman on the ferry-boat, and her face grew thoughtful and sober as she remembered the frail little mother and the puny baby.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed involuntarily, with an expression of dismay.

"Have you dropped something on your dress, daughter?" asked Mrs. Gilbert, with motherly anxiety about Christie's pretty spring suit.

"No, mother, nothing as bad as that," laughed Christie, as she became aware that the exclamation had escaped her. "Perhaps I had better say, though, that it's something worse, for I suppose I could get a spot off without spoiling my dress, but I am not sure about the other. I think it is too late to repair my mistake."

"Is it something about Achsah's dress?" asked Mrs. Gilbert; then, as Christie smiled again, she went on, "Well, the question of dress is uppermost in my mind just now, after all our consultation, and if you want me to have any ideas on any other subject, you will have to tell me about them yourself."

"So I see," laughed Christie. "I am sorry to have Achsah think I have such a worldly and frivolous mother, but perhaps she'll like you a little, notwithstanding your love of dress. I'll tell you what I was thinking about, mother, for I'm sure you would never guess," and she described the poor woman whom they had seen that morning with her little baby.

"I am so annoyed with myself that I did n't

ask her address," Christie concluded. "She did look so poor and forlorn, and I suppose there are ever so many things she needs. Perhaps we girls might have been able to do ever so many nice little things for her if we only knew where she lived."

"It would have been a very good plan to get her address," Mrs. Gilbert assented. "It is just possible that you may see her again some time, for she will have to go backward and forward on the boat a great deal if she brings the baby in to the hospital every day. Of course it would be a mere chance, but you might watch for her."

"I do hope we will happen to meet her," Christie said, with a brightening face. "I shall always feel sorry when I think of her if I don't see her again. She did look so friendless and discouraged."

The conversation drifted to other subjects, and the little party sat finishing their lunch very leisurely until Mrs. Gilbert glanced at her watch with an exclamation of surprise. "We must make haste or we shall lose the two o'clock train," she said. "Come, girls, gather up your bundles, and we will do the best we can to get over to the station in time." They found they had not a moment to spare and had barely time to hurry on the ferry-boat before the gate was shut.

Christie's eyes roamed among the passengers in eager quest of the woman with her baby, although she would not let herself hope that the object of her search might be in the same boat.

"Christie, I see her!" exclaimed Achsah, touching Christie's arm to attract her attention.

"Where?" queried Christie eagerly.

"In that corner at the end of the cabin. You can hardly get a glimpse of her, but she is just behind that stout man reading a newspaper."

Christie's face grew radiant.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed joyfully.

"Mother, may I go and speak to her now; I am afraid it will be too late after the boat stops."

Mrs. Gilbert smiled assent, and a moment later the thin tired face of the woman lighted up with a smile of pleased recognition as her friend of the morning spoke to her. Christie stayed by her until the boat had nearly reached the other side of the river, and then went back to her mother, lest the little party should be separated in the confusion which always followed the landing of the boats.

"Mother, I believe she is my 'nexte thyng,'"

she whispered, as she deposited her bundles by her mother's side in the train. "I will tell you all about her when we get home, and I am beginning to have an idea about her already."

There was an answering smile in Mrs. Gilbert's eyes as Christie's blue ones looked into her face, full of eager enthusiasm. It was a pleasure to her to encourage Christie in any of her kindly plans for the happiness of others, and the young girl had learned years ago that her mother was always a sympathizing confidante, so she never failed to go to her first of all, whenever a plan suggested itself to her busy brain, assured of help and encouragement.

That very afternoon the dress was begun; the breadths for the skirt were cut off, and Christie sewed them on the machine while Achsah basted, under Mrs. Gilbert's directions.

"Achsah, don't take the dress over to the Institute when it's done, but come over here and dress for Commencement evening, so mother can help us both. It will be ever so much pleasanter than getting dressed all by yourself at the school. I want to fix your hair myself, and mother will give the finishing touches to your sash and ruching, wont you, mother?"

"I shall be very glad to have two girls to dress instead of one," Mrs. Gilbert responded. "I think that will be a very good plan, Achsah, if you would like it."

"Of course I would like it above all things," exclaimed Achsah eagerly. "Why, I should feel

just as if I belonged somewhere, instead of being all by myself."

"We are going to be so proud of Achsah's valedictory that we'll be proud to make believe you belong to us, even if it's only to the extent of dressing here," laughed Christie. A little shadow clouded the brightness of Achsah's face.

"I have been thinking so many times lately how lovely it must be to have a mother to be pleased if one does well," she said. "You are so good and kind to me, Mrs. Gilbert, that I realize more than ever how much it is to have a mother."

Mrs. Gilbert gave her a loving little hug, as she brought her work over to her for inspection.

"I know no one can take a mother's place, dear," she said, "but you must accept me for a substitute now and then, and let me be interested in all that you do."

Achsah sealed the compact with a kiss, as the motherly embrace stirred her heart to its depths, and she knew that the old desolate feeling had taken to itself wings for ever.

When the evening meal was concluded and Achsah began somewhat reluctantly to make preparations for her return to the Institute, she saw Christie's eyes fixed on her half wistfully.

"What is it, Christie?" she asked. "I see

you are just aching to say something, and I want to know what it is."

"I really have a great mind to tell you," Christie answered. "I wonder what you would think of me if I gave you a little scolding, Achsah?"

"I should think you were the very kindest and best of friends, and meant it for my good," returned Achsah promptly. "Please tell me, Christie."

"I wish you wouldn't hide your real self away," said Christie, with a little effort. "Wont you just be your bright natural self when Monday comes, instead of Ishmael? I do want the other girls to know you as you really are, and I know you would like them so much if you only were acquainted with them; and it seems such a pity for a mutual misunderstanding to go on to the end of the term. Please, Achsah."

The old hard expression came back upon the girl's features, and she shook her head.

"I can't do that for you, Christie," she said. "I don't care what the girls think of me. If any of them had ever showed me the least kindness or consideration I might think about it, but it is too late now. I don't care whether they think I am disagreeable or not."

Christie looked disappointed.

“I don’t think you are quite fair to them,” she said gently. “I am sure if you will only show yourself willing to be friendly you wont find them unwilling to meet you half way at least.”

Achsah looked incredulous.

“No, they have never liked me, because I had not nice clothes to wear; and I am sure nothing I could do would make them change their opinions of me. I don’t mind how the rest of them act now, you are so good to me.”

“Indeed, Achsah, it has never been your clothes altogether that kept the girls from being friendly towards you,” said Christie earnestly. “I know that they have felt that you did not like them and would not feel kindly towards them, so naturally they left you alone. If you would only act at school as you have acted here, you would find yourself just as popular as any girl. I do wish you would, just to please me, if for no other reason.”

Still Achsah hesitated, but she could not resist Christie’s pleading.

“Well, I will try,” she said, with sudden resolve. “I will be just as pleasant as I possibly can, since you want me to, though I know it wont do any good. I don’t feel so lonely and bitter any more, so it wont be as hard as it would have

been last week or even this week to be pleasant. I wish I could half thank you, not only for the dress, but for this lovely visit. I don't know when I have ever enjoyed myself so much, and I shall never feel again as I did yesterday afternoon, when you found me crying over my dress."

"I have enjoyed your visit, too," said Christie, "and I am only sorry that I never got acquainted with you before, for we might have had so many pleasant times together. This must be the beginning, though, instead of the end."

It was a light-hearted Achsah that went back to Maplewood Institute just as the shadows were beginning to gather. She sat in the twilight until the stars had begun to gleam out one by one, and then she rose and lighted her lamp, with a look of pleasant determination upon her face.

"I will do my very best now," she said, as she drew her portfolio towards her and bent over some papers which she took from it. "Now that I shall look as well as the other girls, and have some one to care whether I succeed or not, I shall work harder than I ever have before to make my valedictory the best work I have accomplished."

She read over her essay again and again, with a thoughtful frown upon her brow, correcting a

phrase here and altering a sentence there, until it suited her better. At last nine o'clock was pealed slowly out by the clock in the church tower, and she put her work away and prepared for bed.

When her light was extinguished she raised the curtain, and kneeling down beside the window looked up into the quiet starlit sky.

"Mother," was her heart's thought, "I wonder if you love me and think of me sometimes when you are so far away. Are you glad to-night that I am so happy and that I have found friends?"

Some new impulse made her bow her head as she knelt there, with the stars looking down upon her like the eyes of angels, and breathe a prayer of gratitude to God for the joy the day had brought her and a supplication for forgiving and restoring grace. Achsah's life had been a prayerless one of late, and it was no wonder her burdens had seemed too heavy to be borne, when she had tried to carry them alone and unaided.

Brief as was her prayer to-night, it was one step in the right direction in the path that was to lead her back to the God whom her parents had loved and served, and to whom they had consecrated her at her very birth. The bitter

thoughts she had harbored so long were gone to-night, and her heart was not filled with envy of those who had the blessings of which her own life had been barren, but loving thoughts of Christie's kindness made her last waking moments happy ones and mingled with her dreams.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMMENCEMENT.

ACHSAH did not forget her promise to Christie, and she found herself looking forward to the surprise of the girls when they should discover that she was really trying to be pleasant and agreeable, instead of apparently seeking for ways in which to be perverse.

She was at her desk Monday morning when Louise Rushton and Ella Lindsay entered the schoolroom, and glancing up she nodded with a pleasant good morning.

"Ishmael is in a friendly mood this morning, isn't she?" said Ella softly, behind her desk cover.

"Yes, she seems to be," returned Louise. "I wonder what has got into her anyhow. How nice her hair looks too. It's a pity her pleasant mood won't last. I suppose she would snap my head off if I should venture another remark on the strength of her having said good morning."

A few minutes later she uttered a petulant exclamation.

"Did you ever know anything quite so pro-

voking! I have left my geometry at home, and I don't know what I'll do without it. You can't spare me yours, can you, Ella?"

"I'm really sorry I can't, but I have n't looked at the lesson at all yet," Ella responded. "I shall have to study every moment until recitation to get through at all. It's too bad."

"Well, I'll have to go home again, that's all!" responded Louise. "I'll be late for school, too, and lose all this time: but I don't see any help for it."

Two days ago Achsah would not have paid any attention to this conversation, but now a new desire was actuating her, and she looked up from her book as Louise arose.

"You can take my geometry if you wish," she said, proffering the book. "I am almost certain that I know it, and if you can let me have it just the last ten minutes to make sure of it, I can spare the book now just as well as not."

"It's ever so good of you, Achsah," Louise said gratefully. "I did hate to think of that long walk in the sun, and then I need all my time for study this morning, anyway. I meant to get up early, but I overslept myself, so I'm not half prepared with any of my recitations. Are you sure you can spare the book?"

"Oh, yes, you are welcome to it," Achsah

answered pleasantly, and so Louise took the book with warm thanks, and sat down to pore over the lesson, wondering in between the problems if it had been her own fault that she had always thought Achsah's manner disagreeable before.

Christie's cordial greeting to Achsah when she came in rather surprised the others, who had not known of her visit; but no comment was made, and when they saw that Achsah responded pleasantly to all advances, she met with kindness from the others too, who had heretofore been somewhat in awe of her sharp speeches. As the days passed away one and another regretted that they had not found out before what a bright companion Achsah could be, and she was compelled to admit that it had been largely her own fault that she had been left to herself before, for the girls were quite ready to be social and pleasant when they found she was willing to be friendly.

The great day came at last to which seven at least of the Maplewood students had been eagerly looking forward for the past year. It was a perfect June day, clear and cloudless, and the beautiful weather completed the girls' happiness, for many of them had friends who were to come from a distance to witness the closing exercises.

Weston was very proud of its Institute, and a great deal of interest was always manifested in

Commencement night, so it was not strange that the girls felt as if they closed their school life with the eyes of all their little world resting upon them.

"It's a shame Ishmael can't have a decent dress for once," Louise Rushton said that morning to Grace Davenport, as for the last time the girls gathered in the old schoolroom to rehearse their essays and go through the programme for the evening's entertainment.

"I believe she would be really pretty if she was only dressed becomingly," Grace returned, as she looked at the quiet face which had lost its fretful, peevish expression. "Poor old Ishmael, it's enough to sour any one's disposition to have to wear the clothes that she does. Hush, she's going to begin her valedictory. I'm eager to hear it."

All the class were anxious to hear their valedictorian's essay, and there was a profound silence while Achsah took her place. None of the girls feared that she would disappoint them, for she was admitted to be the best writer in school, and had invariably won the first prize for composition every year. She had a clear voice, and enunciated distinctly, and every word could be easily heard. The girls glanced at each other in delight as she proceeded. The principal smiled

with satisfaction as she thought of the credit that Achsah would reflect on the Institute, and she too wished that the girl might be well dressed for once.

Graceful and eloquent was the valedictory, and at times almost pathetic, for Achsah had realized at last all that the class might have been to each other in the way of mutual help and sympathy. That she had stood outside the charmed circle had been largely her own fault, and the late friendliness which she had proffered and won had given her a dim realization of the friendship that might have grown to be a strong bond of union between them.

As she concluded there was a hearty outburst of applause, led by her classmates and joined in by the whole school, which Miss Giddings did not attempt to check. School rules were not very rigidly adhered to this last day of the term, and she felt that Achsah deserved this little triumph.

As Achsah went back to her seat, blushing at the generous meed of praise so freely bestowed upon her, she caught Christie's smile of loving congratulation, and an answering light shone in her own eyes. Christie's kindness had been her inspiration to do her best, and the thought that she had some one to rejoice in her success stimulated her to even more than her wonted exertion.

It had been a pleasant surprise to her to find that all her classmates were so willing to show their appreciation and felt her success to be a class honor, and all trace of bitterness left her as she recognized their kindly spirit.

Perhaps Miss Giddings suspected that motherly Mrs. Gilbert intended to make some addition to Achsah's usual plain toilet, for she very willingly assented to Christie's petition that Achsah might spend the rest of the day with her and dress at her house; so when rehearsal was over the girls dispersed, not to meet again until the evening.

Although every day for some time beforehand had been occupied with preparations, yet none of the girls were idle this last afternoon. There were finishing touches to be put upon the filmy dresses for the evening, a few last moments spent upon some difficult passage in a piece of music, or a little more familiarity to be gained with the essays which they already knew almost by heart.

The girls that lived near each other paid flying visits, and admired each other's dresses and evening preparations, and Mrs. Gilbert's room was invaded half a dozen times by girls eager to see Christie's dress once more. It had arrived the day before, and Christie was in an ecstasy of

delight over the pretty dress, with its soft laces and floating ribbons.

In the next room Achsah's dress was spread out upon the bed, none the less beautiful to her eyes, although she shared in Christie's admiration of her own dress. No one had asked Achsah what she intended to wear, though all the various details of the dresses of the rest of the class had been discussed again and again by almost all the school, who took the most profound interest in their seniors' doings upon Commencement, and Achsah and Christie laughed over the anticipated surprise of the girls when they should see Achsah make her appearance that evening as daintily robed as the rest.

The tempting tea that Mrs. Gilbert had provided was slighted by the girls, who were too excited over the evening's events to feel any appetite, and at six o'clock they pleaded to begin to dress.

"Oh, Christie," Achsah exclaimed, throwing her arms about her friend's neck, as she touched her pretty dress with almost loving fingers, "I do n't know how to thank you enough, and Mrs. Gilbert too. How miserable I should be to-night if I had nothing to wear but one of my old dresses. I should n't have courage to read my essay if I felt that I was disgracing you all."

"No fear of that," laughed Christie, "when you are going to carry off all the honors."

Mrs. Gilbert helped the girls, and Achsah enjoyed the motherly touches that made her look as if loving hands had been at work for her.

There was real affection in the kiss she gave Achsah and in her wishes for her success that evening, when the two girls started for the hall where the Commencement exercises were to be held. Her sympathies had been warmly enlisted in behalf of the motherless girl, and it had been a pleasure to her to do all she could to make this last evening of her school-life a happy one.

When Achsah entered the little room that had been set apart for the graduates, there was a buzz of admiration as the girls gathered about her and freely expressed their approbation of her dress and appearance, and Christie was radiant over the success of her plan.

A little later the hour for opening the evening's exercises had arrived, and looking like a "rosebud garden of girls" the school took their places in the hall, while the graduates went to the seats assigned them upon the platform. The exercises passed off with great enjoyment to the audience. One after another the girls, with their hearts beating with timidity and excitement, read their essays or played their selections, and at

last the time had come for Achsah's valedictory. She had been apt to be somewhat awkward and abrupt in her movements, but this evening the self-respect which her toilet gave her lent her ease and grace. None of the other girls possessed Achsah's marked individuality, and none proved more attractive in appearance than the slender, dark-haired girl who came forward as the class valedictorian.

For a moment her courage failed her and her cheeks paled as she saw the sea of expectant faces before her; then she saw Mrs. Gilbert's kind face looking encouragingly towards her, and summoning her resolution she determined that she would do her best, that this kind friend should not be disappointed. The first few words were tremulous, but then her will asserted itself and the clear young voice could be heard all over the hall, while the audience listened appreciatively to the speaker.

When the last words had died away a hearty burst of applause showed the appreciation of the audience, and Achsah was called forward again to receive a basket of flowers, to which Mrs. Gilbert's card was attached.

Achsah's heart swelled with gratitude at this proof of thoughtful kindness. She had not let herself expect any flowers, as she had no friends

to remember her in this way, as the other girls had, so it was a delightful surprise to find that even this happiness was added to the other pleasures of the evening.

Nothing had been lacking, and when the diploma for which she had studied so faithfully was placed in her hand, she did not remember any of the trials of her school-days, but only the happiness with which the last two weeks had been laden.

"I owe it all to you, Christie," she whispered gratefully.

"Only the very smallest part of it, dear," Christie returned. "Nothing that I did made your essay the best of all, and made you deliver it so well. I'm just as proud of you as I can be, and so is mother. I was watching her face while you were speaking, and she looked just as happy as if I had been the one who was distinguishing myself."

Congratulations were not wanting, but the words Achsah valued most of all were the motherly ones which Mrs. Gilbert whispered.

Miss Giddings was so pleased with Achsah's success that she treated her with an affectionate pride that was almost bewildering to the girl, who had never supposed that she was any favorite with the principal.



She was chatting merrily with Christie when Miss Giddings came to her again and said graciously,

"I am sorry to part you from your companion for a few moments, Achsah, but some friends of mine are anxious to meet you, and I promised to bring you to them."

Achsah followed Miss Giddings and was presently introduced to a lady and gentleman who had been among the guests of the evening.

Miss Giddings left them after a few words of explanation to Achsah, and an interview followed which made the young girl's face radiant with delight.

"What has happened to you?" asked Christie laughingly, when she returned to her side a little later with a suppressed eagerness in her manner that betrayed her excitement. "Have your friends presented you with a gold mine?"

"I feel as if they had," Achsah returned. "Oh, Christie, can you believe it? for I hardly can: that gentleman and lady came here for a teacher, and have been inquiring about me of Miss Giddings, and have asked me if I would go to them after school closes, and teach their little girl who is a cripple. They are going to travel this summer and in the winter they live in the city. Is n't it too good to believe?"

"Splendid!" returned Christie, who knew how necessary it was that her friend should have an early opportunity of putting her education to practical use. "Tell me all about it."

"Well, I must begin by saying that she liked my essay," began Achsah, blushing a little; "and then Miss Giddings was kind enough to praise my scholarship, and say that I had been very thorough in all my studies. She told her, too, that I had been fitting myself with a view to teaching as soon as I could get a position. This lady has been wanting to procure a young teacher for her little girl, who could be something of a companion as well as a teacher, and so the demand and supply being brought together, the arrangement was concluded at once. She apologized for speaking about it to-night, but said she thought we could arrange matters more satisfactorily than if she waited to write. I am so happy, for I was afraid I should have to wait until next fall at least and perhaps longer. You can't make me believe, Christie dear, that I don't owe this good fortune to you, for I know she would never have even wanted to engage me if I had been dressed in that hideous green, and mumbled my essay in the subdued tones which I certainly should have chosen if I had felt myself to be a shabby, friendless waif."

"You can insist that I added a little to your outside adornments if you are determined to," Christie said, "but you will find it very hard to convince me that she engaged this dress as an instructress."

The friends were separated for a time as Christie was called away to speak to some family friends who wanted to congratulate her upon her essay and diploma, but there was no danger of Achsah's being neglected or left alone. There were plenty to pay attention to the young valedictorian who had borne her honors so modestly, and it was an evening of triumph for Achsah. Long after the guests had dispersed, and the tired girls had gone to rest, she tossed restlessly about, thinking of the events of the evening, her promising future, and of the friend who had so generously helped her to be at her best for once.

"I never can repay Christie and kind Mrs. Gilbert, never," she said to herself again and again.

"I wish I might some day become famous, a friend really worth having," she thought to herself. "No matter how many friends I have, I shall never forget that Christie came to me when I was alone and friendless and no one cared what became of me. I was wholly discouraged that day, and had almost made up my mind to stop

trying to be anybody or to learn anything; and she put new hopefulness into me, and was kind to me even after I had repulsed her. Sweet, generous Christie! I can't love her enough to repay her for all this."

With tender thoughts of her friend she fell asleep, forgetting entirely the infinitely more loving and patient Friend who had given her this earthly friend, and whose love was more forbearing and enduring than any human love could be.

CHAPTER IX.

PLANS.

It was two weeks after Commencement, and the girls had begun to weary of their idleness after the excitement of the closing scenes of their school-life, and some of them to almost wish that they had a regular routine of lessons to look forward to in the fall, they felt so objectless with their school-days behind them.

Achsah alone did not have any opportunity to share this feeling. After a week spent with Christie, during which Mrs. Gilbert insisted upon helping her prepare a suitable wardrobe for her new home, she had gone away to enjoy a pleasant summer in travel, as well as to begin her chosen vocation of teaching.

Christie had never let her know that she had given up her own summer trip that she might procure her the tasteful dress to which she justly felt that she owed so much; for she knew it would spoil all Achsah's pleasure in it if she should learn what denial it had cost her friend.

Christie was glad that she had chosen as she did, for she had delighted in Achsah's success as

if it had been her own, and she knew she could not have enjoyed her own dress if her school-mate had had to make her appearance in the soiled and unbecoming silk or one of her school dresses. She still had enough of her fifty dollars remaining to enable her to carry out her charitable projects for some time to come, and she had already determined that a share should be appropriated towards the happiness and comfort of the poor little German woman.

It was Saturday afternoon, and one after another the girls had dropped in until all the members of the graduating class were gathered upon Mrs. Gilbert's porch, seated on the steps, in the hammock, and on every available perch.

Commencement had been discussed so often that the girls were beginning to weary of the subject, and after a little desultory conversation the girls had relapsed into a silence that was only broken now and then by some ridiculous remark from Louise, who generally considered it her mission to be amusing.

"Let's be very truthful and have an open confession of our real feelings," suggested Grace, when Louise had rallied her upon her silence with the words, "A penny for your thoughts!"

"Who can honestly and truthfully say that she is glad her school-days are over?"

"Well, I will lead the way for the rest of you, and own up to the truth. I for one am sorry that our days at the dear old Institute are over," said Louise. "I used to think that I would be perfectly happy when I got for ever beyond the sound of Miss Giddings' 'Young ladies, attention, *if* you please,' and had bidden an eternal farewell to my books; but I am actually hankering after them again."

"I feel all unsettled," said Ella Lindsay. "Commencement night it seemed a grand and inspiring thing to talk about beginning our vocation in life and leading noble lives that would enrich and bless the world; but somehow I don't see anything before me but just an aimless sort of drifting. I suppose I'll do like all other girls I know of who have left school. I really did have some high ambitions about the time I was writing my essay, but I expect I shall be perfectly contented to read novels, go to parties, and have as gay a time as possible and help mother a little between times."

"It does n't seem worth while to have spent so many years in preparing for a vocation, when that vocation seems to be principally that of being a butterfly," said Elsie Dunning.

"We wont be any worse than any of our predecessors, if we are butterflies," said Florence

Dinsmore. "As long as I have been attending the Institute it has always been just the same way. Commencement night a set of girls have graduated who have written flowery essays in which they have glorified the mission of women, and done their best to convince you that they were a set of heroines just waiting to finish their education before they would develop into the most remarkable women that ever lived in the world. At the very least you would expect to find a few female philanthropists, missionaries, famous writers, or household angels among them; but in a few weeks these aspiring souls have developed a great fondness for lawn tennis, or some other high and ennobling pursuit, that somehow got left unmentioned in their essays, and they all seem quite contented with a very matter-of-fact gay time. I suppose that is just what we will do, and we wont be any more frivolous than our predecessors."

"If we only worked together, and instead of taking quite such high objects at which to aim as we spoke of in our essays, were contented to live our class motto, I believe we would be of some use," said Christie.

"Hear! Hear!" exclaimed Louise. "Christie has enough of the Commencement spirit still left in her to believe that we need n't be abso-

lutely frivolous. Proceed with your speech, Christie, and if you can show any just or reasonable cause for our being useful, we will begin at once."

Christie laughed. Louise's nonsense never overpowered her as it did some of the others.

"Well, I have a little plan that I would like to submit to the wisdom of the class," she proceeded. "I think it would be nice for us to be united together in some sort of an informal society, so we need n't drift apart as the members of some of the other classes have; and we might have general usefulness for an object. Of course we cannot undertake any great piece of work. Though I would publicly stand up for the many and varied talents of the members of this class, and deny that anything was impossible to such united talent, still privately, in the bosom of the class, I must confess I don't think we'll any of us make a great stir in the world; and if we can be helpful in some modest way, it will be all we can do. If we all work together, I am sure we will find ever so many things to do that will make people happier for having known us, and we will be happy in doing them, for then we won't feel that our life is just an aimless drifting."

"What could we do?" queried practical

Elsie. "Have you thought of anything, or are your little things as elusive and shapeless as the great achievements of our essays seem to be?"

"Yes, I was thinking of something we might begin to do at once," Christie replied, and she told them of the woman with the sick baby whom she had met upon the ferry-boat.

"This morning mother and I went down to see her," she went on, as the girls listened to the pathetic little story with silent interest. "She lives in the basement of a miserable tenement house, in one front room that is hardly as large as this porch. The baby is six weeks old now, but it is such a little puny mite you might think he was only a few days old. It is damp and stifling both in the room, if you can imagine such a combination, and the poor mother looks as sick as the baby. It is touching to see how fond she is of him, and she never seems to think of her own hardships in having to take him to the hospital so often in this hot weather, when most of the time she walks all the way to and from the ferry-boat for want of car-fare; but she just mourns over his suffering."

"Can't the husband earn anything?" asked Elsie.

"He has been at work again this last week," Christie answered, "but she told us that about

two months ago he hurt his hand and has n't been able to do anything until just now. They had no money except his daily earnings, so of course they got in debt, and it is hard for them to buy even the plainest food, while they have back rent and grocery bills to pay. The poor baby has scarcely any clothes at all, and the mother is n't much better off."

"Will the baby always be blind?" asked Grace. Christie shook her head.

"No, the sight has left one eye entirely, but the other eye is almost well, and the doctor has told her that after the next week she need not bring it over to the hospital but once a month. He told her to try and get a ticket from some of the Fresh Air societies and go away into the country with it; but she is a foreigner, and does n't know how to go to work to ask for one, and I'm afraid she would be too late anyway, there are always so many applications on hand. Now don't you see my plan, girls? I came home full of it, and I should have called a class meeting very soon to talk it over, if you had n't all happened in this afternoon."

"I think I see it!" exclaimed Louise. "We are to be a sort of fairy godmother to that poor woman and her baby, and come to her relief with tea and blankets, or their equivalents."

"Oh, Louise, what a melting suggestion this hot afternoon!" exclaimed Christie reproachfully, wielding her large palm leaf with more energy, as if she imagined herself swathed in blankets and drinking hot tea.

"Their equivalents, if you please, instead of the real articles. I thought we might make both of the poor things some clothes, and then—perhaps my opinion of what this class could do was unbounded by possibility—but the charming plan occurred to me that *perhaps* it would be possible for us to give her a couple of weeks in the country with her baby."

"I think that would be lovely, if we could only do it," exclaimed Florence enthusiastically.

"If! This class knows no such word as if," said Louise. "This class has no limits to its powers and capacities. It has but to will and accomplish. You are an unworthy member if you do not at once and for ever erase such an ignoble word."

"Truly, I think we could accomplish it," said Elsie. "We could easily make the clothes, if the thermometer does not rise any higher, and I am sure we could pay her board somewhere in the country with a little self-denial. Some of us might have to restrict ourselves in soda water,

to be sure," with a mischievous glance at Louise, who was known to squander all her pocket money through the summer months at the soda water fountain.

"Or chocolate caramels," retorted that young lady in retaliation, for they were Elsie's pet indulgence.

"Let us see what materials we can collect, and begin work as soon as possible," suggested Florence. "The weather is so oppressive that the sooner we can get their clothing ready and send them to some cool place, the greater would be the chances of the poor baby's life, I should think."

"Suppose we meet every morning for an hour or so, for it will be cooler then to work than later in the day," said Grace. "It will be such a bother to carry the work backward and forward that we had better leave it at one house, if any one is willing to take charge of it. I would offer our house, only it is so far out of the way that I know you would n't any of you want to come."

"Our house is central," interposed Christie, "and mother said we could have any meetings here that we wanted to, and she would help us if we needed her."

"She's a brick!" remarked Louise, relapsing into her favorite slang, in which she tried to imi-

tate her brother, who was a college boy and consequently delighted in expressing his meaning in as ambiguous a way as possible.

"But, Christie, I thought you were going away very soon with your aunt," said Grace.

"I have changed my mind and given up that trip," Christie answered quietly. She had so often spoken of her prospective pleasure that all the girls knew she had expected to be away the greater part of her summer, and though she had not mentioned the subject lately, none of them knew that she had given it up.

"Oh, Christie Gilbert, aren't you dreadfully disappointed?" exclaimed Florence, who knew how eagerly Christie had looked forward to it.

"What did you give it up for?" queried Louise.

"No, I am not disappointed, at least not so very much," Christie replied in answer to the first question, "for I gave it up of my own accord and had an equivalent in its place; but I won't tell you what I gave it up for, Louise. That's a profound secret."

"Well, I sha'n't attempt to guess," Louise responded. "I can't imagine any inducement strong enough to give up such a perfect trip as the one your aunt had planned. I'm glad you are not going, however, for we'd miss you like

everything, particularly if we are going to be so useful. We will want you for our pendulum to keep us running smoothly."

"Thank you," laughed Christie. "It's very flattering to be told that I am a necessary part of the class machinery, and I should probably be tempted to stay at home in any case after that speech."

"Then, since your mother is willing, we may decide upon this house being the headquarters for our work," said Elsie. "This will be such a lovely place to sit and sew these warm mornings, for I believe there is always a breeze upon this porch if there isn't a breath stirring anywhere else. I wish we could get the things all made next week. It puts me in a perspiration to think of that stifling basement a day like this."

"And you can't even begin to imagine how stifling it is unless you have seen it," Christie said, with a little shudder at the remembrance of the close room and the odors that came in through the window from the piles of rubbish in the street.

"I should think we could easily make at least one change apiece for each of them," said Ella, "and then they could go away somewhere while we were making the rest. I'm in a hurry to get them into the country."

"I wish they could come out here," said Florence.

"Would n't it be nice !" agreed Christie. "I don't know whom we could get to board them though."

"I don't either," Louise said. "I don't suppose we could think of engaging rooms at the hotel or any of the summer boarding-houses for them, and I don't know of any other place where we could get a room for them."

"There wont be any trouble in finding a place somewhere," Grace interposed. "There are ever so many places where they take just such people at very low rates, so it does n't really matter if we can't have her here, though of course it would be much nicer. Well, I must be going home. It is agreed that we meet Monday morning at nine o'clock, with all the materials we can collect, and begin work. Is any one coming my way?"

"I am," Florence answered, rising to her feet and brushing off the shower of pink and white petals that had drifted down upon her while she had been sitting upon the steps. "Monday morning, then, we'll have a class reunion, and turn ourselves into a Dorcas instead of a literary society."

The other girls soon dispersed, and Christie

went in to find her mother and acquaint her with the success of her plan for the poor woman's relief.

"I knew the girls would like a piece of work of that kind," her mother said. "I think in about a week or ten days at most you will have the poor mother away from that stifling alley, and breathing the pure air somewhere. It will be the only thing that will save that poor baby's life, I am sure. Now, Christie, don't you want to take a walk with me? I want to take some work out to Miss Abigail, and the sun is so low that I think we will find it very pleasant by the river."

"That will be delightful," Christie assented eagerly, and in a few minutes the mother and daughter were on their way. The road wound along by the river, and the breeze which rippled the placid surface of the broad stream was very refreshing after the heat of the day.

It was somewhat over a mile to their destination, but the time passed away so pleasantly that the walk did not seem at all long, and they were soon at Miss Abigail's gate.

CHAPTER X.

MISS ABIGAIL'S NEXTE.

It was a little old-fashioned rambling house before which Christie and her mother stopped, the low picket-fence overrun with vines, and the flower-beds before the windows looking as if they might have been planted in the time of our grandmothers, so quaint and "old timey" were the flowers.

A little old lady sat by the window knitting, and the bright needles gleamed like silver as they flashed backward and forward in her nimble fingers, though her eyes were fixed upon the river and she scarcely seemed to heed what she was doing.

As the latch of her gate was lifted the click broke in upon her reverie, and she sprang to her feet, while a look of welcome brightened her face.

She was an active little woman, one to whom the New England epithet of "spry" would most aptly apply. She always reminded Christie of a little wren, her movements were so quick, and she had a birdlike fashion of poising her head on one side when she talked, her bright black eyes

fairly snapping with eagerness when she grew much interested in what she was saying.

Miss Abigail was the last of a large family who had been born in the little brown house, and she could easily remember when the garden that was so quiet now had been filled with a troop of noisy and bonneted children who had played and frolicked together, as happy and unconscious of care as if they had been the fledglings in one of the nests that were hidden away beneath the eaves.

One after another the quiet village of the dead had made room for them, and a short green mound had marked the ended child life, until at last only Miss Abigail and her youngest brother had been left with the father and mother in the home nest.

There was a vein of waywardness in this youngest boy that grieved the parents, who had found all their other children dutiful and docile. It was as if a cuckoo's egg had been hatched in a dove's nest, and as the boy grew older there were scenes of contention in the quiet little house, and harsh words would pass between the father and the son, while the sorrowful mother would shed tears over the wayward boy who was so totally unlike all her other children.

These quarrels had culminated one night in a

bitter contention in which the boy had flung himself out of the house, declaring that he would never enter it again as long as he lived. He had disappeared in the darkness, and no one had ever seen or heard of him again. Day after day the feeble old mother watched for some sign or word from her wandering boy, his mother's darling yet in spite of all his wrong-doing, for was he not her baby, the last to lie upon her heart in unconscious infancy, and to be cradled in her arms!

The old father passed away, leaving his forgiveness and blessing for the wanderer, and at last there came a day when the mother too knew that she could not wait for her boy's return.

"You will never leave the old home, will you, Abby?" she quavered pitifully, her fast dimming eyes fixed on her daughter in eager entreaty. "Promise me that Tim will always find his home here when he comes back, for I know he will come some day. He was always a good boy at heart, if he did anger his father. You will always keep a light burning in the window for him and the door on the latch, wont you, Abby? Tell him I waited as long as I could for him and I always loved him to the last."

"I'll be waiting for him when he comes, mother," Abby promised, and a look of content crossed the eager face.

"You wont forget? You'll always stay here?" asked the feeble voice again; and as once more the daughter promised, the dim old eyes closed to open upon the radiance of heaven, and Abigail was left alone in the home which had once been so full of young life.

It seemed to her then like the deserted last year's nest swinging tenantless and desolate in the limb of the old apple-tree, and she wished that she might have gone with her mother. A less brave and joyous spirit might have grown gloomy and self-pitying with such a lonely life, but by the time the green sod had stretched its velvety mantle over the newly-turned earth which marked the place where the mother was laid to rest beside her children, Miss Abigail had learned a lesson of sweet content.

Her Christian life was an earnest, practical one, and she drew sweet lessons of trust in her Heavenly Father from her surroundings that might have been passed unheeded by careless eyes. The river with its broad sweep of blue was a never failing comforter, and even the little brown sparrows that hopped fearlessly about her, making friendly advances towards her, with their bright eyes fixed upon her half confidently, half curiously, chirped to her of the love and care which watched over even the feathered creation

so that not one sparrow could fall to the ground unheeded.

It troubled her most to think that her life was not a more useful one, for it seemed to her that caring principally for her own needs was a selfish existence, and not what she was put into the world for. Many of her acquaintances would have borne witness to her kindness of heart and told of long vigils with the sick, of stitches taken for tired mothers, of many a little delicacy sent to tempt an invalid's capricious taste; but of these things Miss Abigail took no account. "It's only a pleasure," she would say, so cordially that no one could doubt her sincerity.

She was expert in the use of her needle, as only those are who learned to sew before the days of machines had supplanted the daintily set stitches that were beautiful in their regularity and neatness, and she found no difficulty in getting plenty of sewing to do.

She was always glad of visitors, for she was a sociable little body and delighted in a chat with any of her friends.

She welcomed Mrs. Gilbert and Christie with hearty cordiality, slipping her knitting into the capacious pocket of her apron, while she came forward with outstretched hands.

"Well, now, I am certainly glad to see you!"

she exclaimed. "Will you come in, or shall I bring chairs out here for you where you can look at the river while you sit? I'm so fond of it myself I always take it for granted that other folks must enjoy it too. It's great company to me lately, particularly now that I a' n't got much to do but look at it."

"I'm glad to hear that you are not very busy just now," Mrs. Gilbert remarked, as they took the chairs that Miss Abigail placed for them. "I have a little sewing that I wanted you to do, and I was afraid that perhaps you might have so much on hand that I should have to wait for a while. It isn't very often that you are to be found without plenty of work."

"Bless your heart, it isn't for lack of work that I have nothing to do but look at the river," Miss Abigail exclaimed energetically. "I've work enough on hand for a month, but it's my eyes. They seem to have clean given out entirely for anything like sewing, though I can potter around and do other things well enough. I can knit without my eyes, so I don't really have to sit with my hands folded, and I'm thankful enough for that; but it's pretty hard to give my sewing up."

"Indeed it must be hard," Mrs. Gilbert remarked sympathizingly. "You are so fond of

sewing that it must be a real deprivation to have to lay it aside entirely. Your eyes will be better soon if you rest them, wont they?"

"I'm in hopes they will," Miss Abigail answered. "I suppose it's the Lord's way of teaching me a lesson of trust, for I can't quite see my way clear to getting along without my little earnings unless I begin to use the little I have laid up for a rainy day; and I hate to do that. I suppose I must just believe he's able and willing to provide for me without my making any provision for myself, any more than one of these little sparrows, but it's human nature to feel more like trusting if you're doing something for yourself, and human nature's mighty strong in me, I am finding out. I sha' n't really suffer for food, with what I've got in my garden, but one do n't know how to get on without a little money now and then."

"'Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you,'" said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Yes, I know," responded Miss Abigail, "and yet a'n't it strange! it seems as if I'd rather nurse my care and hold on to it and worry over it than just lay it on One who's willing and able to bear it all. Queer, what human nature is. I often wonder how the good Lord can keep his patience with us when we're so trying. Well,

the good Book says he knows the frailty of our frame and seeth we are but dust, and maybe he pities us for being such poor foolish creatures. Perhaps he has taken my work away to give me something else to do for him. I'll just try and bide patient for what he sends me next. If it will please him to send me something to do by which I can earn my living and at the same time be doing something for other folks, I'll be glad and happy. If he should mean that I'm just to sit with folded hands and not be of any good, why he'll give me grace for that, though it will be the hardest work of my life. I'll try and keep ready for my next work, whatever it may be."

A sudden light flashed into Christie's face as she listened.

"Miss Abigail," she asked, "would it be too much trouble to you to give me a glass of your nice spring water?"

"No, indeed, child. Why, I ought to have thought of it myself," and hospitable Miss Abigail hurried away.

"Mother!" exclaimed Christie eagerly, "I was so eager to ask you something that I could n't wait till we started home. I wonder if I can't put Miss Abigail in the way of the 'next' that she is waiting for. She has plenty of room in her house for company, and I wonder if she

would n't board that woman and her baby for us? Just think how lovely it would be to have them here by the river, with lots of fresh air and good wholesome food."

Miss Abigail was pattering back with a glass brimming full of clear cold water, and Christie had to read her mother's approval of her plan in her face.

"Miss Abigail, Christie has a plan to propose to you, I think," Mrs. Gilbert said, when Christie hesitated a little about beginning her project. So Christie went back to the meeting on the ferry-boat, and Miss Abigail listened with many an exclamation of pity.

"Poor little soul!" she said pitifully. "If I was only able to earn a bit with my needle, now, I'd love to make her bring that poor baby here and get a breath of good air."

"That's just my plan, Miss Abigail," exclaimed Christie eagerly. "We want to send them somewhere for a couple of weeks, and of course there are places for people that we could send them to, but we thought it would be so much nicer if they could be here where we could see them sometimes; and we couldn't think of any one who had room who would be willing to take them. Now I was just thinking what a beautiful place this would be for her, and if you

would only take her and let us pay you for her whatever you thought right, it would be so nice. What do you say?"

"Why, that she's heartily welcome," answered Miss Abigail. "I'd be far better pleased if I could see my way to doing for her without a cent of money in return; but the Lord is providing for me in this way at the same time he's providing for her, so it a' n't right for me not to be thankful for his provision for me. Besides, I dare say I can find plenty of chances to do a hand's turn for her now and again, that I can feel I am doing for one of his little ones, even if I am paid for her keep. Yes, I'll be ready for her any day, Miss Christie, and the sooner the better for her. Do n't wait to get her clothes all ready, for she can have those after she gets here, and she ought to have her baby here this moment."

"I will talk to the girls about it Monday morning, and then I will come out here in the afternoon and tell you when to expect her," Christie said, delighted at Miss Abigail's acquiescence. "We will have to tell her about it first, so that her husband can make some arrangement to get his meals somewhere while she is gone; and I am afraid we can hardly get her here before Wednesday or Thursday; but I am eager to see her face when she finds out that she is to be here

with you, where she can look at this beautiful river. Oh, I am so glad you will take her, Miss Abigail! I don't know how to thank you enough."

"I am the one to thank you, child," Miss Abigail answered. "I couldn't have chosen a bit of work for myself that would have pleased me as well as this, and I'll be as happy as a queen again. Maybe I'll have faith enough to trust the Lord for what will come next when I can't quite see the way, for I've had a chance to learn over and over again that he always plans for me better than I could for myself. I'm sorry I can't do your sewing, Mrs. Gilbert, but you know how it is; I'm willing enough if only my eyes would let me."

"I feel as you do, that the Lord is giving you other work just now," Mrs. Gilbert answered, "and I am so glad that you can give this poor woman a share of your peaceful home that I am quite willing to be disappointed about my sewing. I wish we could sit longer, Miss Abigail, the river is so beautiful in the sunset, but we must start homeward, or Mr. Gilbert will not know what has become of us. You will see Christie often enough now, I expect, to make up for the shortness of our visit. Good-by."

"Could anything be lovelier?" asked Christie

joyfully, as they turned their steps towards home. "I don't think there is a place in the world where that poor little woman could be more kindly treated than Miss Abigail will treat her, and this lovely river view will make her forget to look so sad and desolate."

"Perhaps Miss Abigail can teach her some of her own trustfulness," Mrs. Gilbert responded. "I always feel that I have learned something new when I have had a little talk with her, and we could all learn a lesson from her."

"I wonder I did not think about the probability of Miss Abigail's being able to take her before," Christie said. "I could n't think of any one who would be willing to take the trouble to care for a woman with a sick baby, unless, of course, we could pay a good deal of board for her, but Miss Abigail's is just the place. She will be glad to do it, more for the sake of the opportunity of doing good than for the money she can earn in that way. Now we must get that poor baby here as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ARRIVAL.

PROMPTLY at nine o'clock on Monday morning the girls assembled at Mrs. Gilbert's, each one well laden with all that she had been able to collect for the poor woman.

They were as delighted as Christie had been when they learned that Miss Abigail was willing to open her little home for the poor babe and its mother, and were anxious to get them out of the hot basement room as quickly as possible.

When they opened their bundles and exhibited their contributions, they were delighted to find that a great deal was ready for immediate use. A dark calico wrapper which had been well worn and was somewhat faded, but still in good condition, needed only a few stitches to make it ready for use; and various articles of under apparel were laid aside with the wrapper. Grace Davenport had gone to a friend who had lost a little babe some time before, and the mother had selected several little garments which were plain enough to be suitable and serviceable and sent them for this little one.

"I believe we have enough already for them to wear out here," Elsie said. "I wonder if they could come to-morrow afternoon. If it is hot here on this shady porch, what must it be where they are!"

"How can we get word to the woman?" asked Ella.

"I should suggest that two of you girls should go in to see her this afternoon when it is cooler," Mrs. Gilbert said, from her seat at the window. "Perhaps she could come to-morrow if she knew about it to-night."

The girls were very much pleased with this plan, and they decided that Elsie and Christie should go down in the afternoon train and make arrangements with the poor mother to come out as soon as possible with her babe.

It was quite warm when Elsie and Christie started on their trip, but when they reached the street where the object of their expedition lived, they felt as if the noonday heat in Weston would be refreshing compared to this close stifling atmosphere.

Christie remembered the house, and led the way to the tall tenement that seemed dingier and more overcrowded than ever in comparison with the pretty houses of Weston and the broad elm-shadowed streets.

"What a dreadful place!" exclaimed Elsie with a shudder of disgust, as she followed Christie down the stone steps.

Christie opened the door that led into the dark narrow hall, and knocked at the first door.

"Come," was the response, and she opened the door to see the pale little woman, who looked whiter and more fragile than ever, sitting in a chair by the window fanning the mite of a baby upon her knee with an old newspaper doubled up to serve as a fan.

"Poor little thing!" said Elsie pityingly, as she looked at the wasted face and transparent tiny hands, that looked too waxen to belong to a living child.

Christie had hard work to explain the purpose of her visit to the mother, and she and Elsie had to search for the simplest language and the most expressive gestures to convey their meaning. When at last it dawned upon her that she was to take her baby away from that hot, close room, where no breath of fresh air could possibly penetrate, she burst into a flood of joyful tears, and fairly overpowered the girls with her broken exclamations of gratitude.

When they gave her the clothes they had brought her delight knew no bounds, and she seemed even more pleased with the soft garments

for the baby than with the clothes that she herself needed so much.

Everything about the room was scrupulously clean, poor and bare as it was, and the baby showed that he was carefully cared for as far as cleanliness went.

"He look pretty in new dress? You no think so?" asked the mother proudly, as she held up the little slip, which, plain though it was, looked very dainty and pretty beside the coarse calico frock which was faded and well mended, besides being much too large for the tiny child.

Before the girls came away they had arranged that the mother and babe should come out to Weston on the nine o'clock train, when Christie and Elsie would meet them with a carriage and take them to Miss Abigail's house.

Christie thoughtfully left some money for travelling expenses, thinking that even that small sum might be an impossible one for the mother to procure upon such short notice.

They found that the husband could stay with his sister on the next block during his wife's absence, and that he would be delighted to have the baby away in the country.

"He loves very much the baby," the mother said.

It was drawing near the close of the afternoon when the girls reached Weston, and they were afraid it would be too late to go out and give Miss Abigail notice of the arrival of her expected guests upon the morrow. Much to their surprise and pleasure, Florence was waiting at the station with a wide phaeton.

"I thought you would want to go out to Miss Abigail's to-night, though you didn't say anything about it this morning," she said, "so I came to meet you and can drive you out if you want to go."

"That is splendid!" exclaimed Christie with a look of relief. "I wanted Miss Abigail to know all about it to-night, but I didn't see how we were ever going to walk out there and back before dark."

"When are they coming?" asked Florence, as the girls seated themselves in the phaeton and the horse started briskly up the street.

"To-morrow morning at nine o'clock," Elsie answered. "Oh, Florence, you ought to see that poor little baby; it isn't much larger than a good-sized doll, and so thin and wan looking. I am sure it couldn't have lived much longer in that wretched cellar. Why, I could hardly breathe while we were in it."

"How it will thrive at Miss Abigail's!" said

Florence. "She will coddle it and nurse it till it is a real fat country boy. I am so glad they are coming."

Miss Abigail was delighted to hear of the speedy advent of her visitors.

"Ready for them?" she echoed in response to Christie's question. "Why, I'm ready for them now. I got their room all fixed this morning, I was in such a hurry for them to come. Just step in and look at it, wont you? I was going to give her one of the up-stairs chambers, and then I thought just as like the poor little woman would n't feel like travelling up and down stairs half-a-dozen times a day, so I concluded I'd fix up the room for her that mother had after she took to her bed. It's a room I've always been meaning to take for my bedroom when I get too old and feeble to go up and down stairs. I'd like it now, but it seems kind of shiftless to have a room down stairs as long as you're able-bodied."

While she had been talking she had been leading the way with swift, pattering footsteps, and now she ushered them into a square room that opened off the parlor.

"Oh, if you could just see her home, Miss Abigail, you would know what a little bit of heaven this will seem like to her," exclaimed Elsie, as she glanced around the room.

"I'm glad you think it looks nice," said Miss Abigail with gratified pride.

The floor was as white as years of scrubbing could make it, with bright braided mats laid here and there upon it. The high four-posted bed looked very inviting, with its neat patch-work quilt and the snowy sheets already turned down for the expected occupant. Feathery plumes of asparagus waved behind the looking-glass, and upon the walls were portraits of the children of the family, chubby unsmiling faces, as if they were awed at the thought of having their pictures taken.

The article of furniture which delighted the girls most was an old-fashioned cradle that stood beside the bed, and they exclaimed over it, while Miss Abigail looked on with a smile that was a little tremulous, as if tears were not very far away. "We were all rocked in that," she said, touching the wooden rocker with her foot so it swayed backward and forward—"every one of us brothers and sisters; and it seems strange to think it will be used again in this house. I can't tell you how it made me feel when I fetched it down from the garret."

"Just imagine that poor little baby in this soft nest!" exclaimed Christie. "You will love him dearly when you see him, Miss Abigail, he

is such a mite; but he will soon get fat and strong here."

The clock on the mantel rang out six strokes in as business-like and peremptory a way as if it had somehow caught some of Miss Abigail's briskness, and Florence looked up in surprise.

"What, is it six o'clock already!" she exclaimed. "Come, girls, we must hurry, or our mothers wont know what has become of us. Good-by, Miss Abigail. You'll soon see me again."

Miss Abigail stood at the gate and looked after the happy girls with a smile on her face as she waved her hand to them in farewell.

"Now a'n't it beautiful to see them about their Father's business!" she said to herself. "And they're happy in it too, as of course they should be, for it always brings a blessing. And isn't it a privilege, when you come to think it all out, that we're let to do anything for him, when he has all those angels to do his bidding? To think that when we are doing for that poor bit of a babe and its mother, we can say to ourselves those blessed words, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me!, Wonderful! wonderful!'"

It would have been hard to tell whose antici-

pations that night were the more pleasurable, those of poor Christina Ehrich, as she hugged her wailing baby, while tears of gratitude rained down her pallid cheeks, or those of the girls who were looking forward to her coming.

Miss Abigail too was in a state of excitement that was unusual with her, and she pattered in and out of the room a dozen times to see if she could not find something more to add to make the room more comfortable.

She even ransacked the hidden treasures of an old chest in the garret, and produced in triumph a wooden rattle for the baby guest's amusement.

Miss Abigail smiled at her own folly the next day when she saw the tiny bird-like hands that were too feeble to close around the mother's finger. But Miss Abigail had had long years in which to forget the tastes and capacities of even a lusty, vigorous six-weeks-old baby, and the rattle showed the strength of her good intentions if not of her judgment.

All the girls were eager to see their *protégées* the next morning, but they managed to restrain their eagerness, lest it should embarrass the little mother.

Christie and Elsie drove down to the station with a two-seated carriage to meet their guest,

and their faces were as eager with excitement as if they expected to meet a dear friend, when they heard the train whistling for the station.

"Wont we be disappointed if she doesn't come!" said Elsie, as they hitched the horse and went around to the platform.

"I don't believe there's much danger of that," Christie answered.

If they had seen Mrs. Ehrich waiting impatiently in the station fully half an hour before train-time, they would both have been quite sure that she would not fail them.

There were not many passengers for Weston at that early hour in the morning, though the cars going the other way were crowded with gentlemen going to business.

The second person to alight was Mrs. Ehrich, a brighter look on her face than Christie could have believed it possible for her to wear, with her baby tightly clasped in her arms.

The girls gave her a warm welcome, and helped her into the carriage with her bundle, and the little party were soon driving rapidly along beside the river towards Miss Abigail's house.

"Did you ever see any one look more delighted?" Elsie whispered, as she glanced back at the thin face that was gazing in rapt admiration at the river.

"Isn't it lovely to think we can have her here!" Christie returned. "And doesn't the baby look sweet in that little white slip and knitted shawl? If you could only have seen the coarse bit of burlap that she had him wrapped up in when I first saw them!"

Miss Abigail was watching for her guests, and as soon as the carriage came around the curve of the road she ran down to the gate in a flutter of eager welcome.

"Why, you poor little mite, you a' n't bigger than a kitten, to be sure!" she exclaimed, as she held out her strong hands for the baby. "I do n't know who looks the sickest, the mother or the baby," she went on in an aside to Christie as Elsie lifted the small bundle out and helped the mother to alight.

"They'll both look the better for your good care, Miss Abigail," Christie returned, touching the baby's wasted cheeks with caressing fingers, as she looked pityingly at the wan little face with its closed eyes.

"I've got a nice breakfast waiting for her," Miss Abigail went on, leading the way into the house. "I did n't suppose she'd have much of a one before she started, and I knew the journey and the fresh air would be likely to give her an appetite anyhow. I'll just show her where the

cradle is, and then if she has a mind she can put him right down in it and come to the table. Is he sick or clean worn out, or do you s'pose he don't ever open his eyes?"

"Oh, he opens his eyes sometimes," Christie explained. "He has lost the sight of one eye, the one that is lighter than the other, but he can open them both. He looks to me as if he was too tired to try to look around, though perhaps he is asleep."

Miss Abigail carried the baby into the room she had prepared for her guests, and, apparently under the impression that a foreigner who could speak very little English must necessarily be somewhat deaf, and must be addressed in as broken speech as possible, cried out in high-pitched tones,

"Cradle for baby. You put him in and he rest. You come eat."

The girls smiled at each other as they listened to Miss Abigail's shrill tones, but to the little German woman she only appeared to be an object of the most profound gratitude. When she saw the little cradle, with its soft white sheets and tiny pillow, she seized Miss Abigail's disengaged hand and kissed it again and again in an outburst of gratitude that embarrassed the good woman, who was not used to such demonstrations.

"There, there, never mind!" she exclaimed, trying to withdraw her hand from the eager grasp. "You just take your baby now, and don't mind me. Bless your heart, I a'n't doing anything but what's a pleasure to do."

The mother took the baby from Miss Abigail, with another outburst of broken thanks, and laying aside the knitted shawl and tiny cap, put him in the soft white nest. The little sheets and other appurtenances of the cradle had been packed away with sprigs of lavender, and as the baby nestled into the soft pillow a subtle fragrance arose.

"I wish you would stay and let me give you something to eat too," Miss Abigail said, as she left Mrs. Ehrich to take off her bonnet, and followed the girls out into the hall.

"The table looks very inviting, Miss Abigail," Christie said, "but we must start home now. The girls are sewing at our house, and they will be anxious to hear how the baby got here and all about it."

The table did indeed look very inviting, with its bright red cloth and the old-fashioned blue china set upon it. The kettle was singing on the wood fire which Miss Abigail had just kindled, and a plate of fresh-laid eggs were ready to be cooked as soon as the water should boil. The

loaf of home-made bread looked deliciously crisp and brown, and the girls could fancy how good everything would taste, eaten in that scrupulously clean, airy kitchen, where one could feast her eyes upon the river all the time.

Bidding Miss Abigail good-by they drove away, carrying with them a pleasant memory of the delighted smile upon the thin, wan face of the mother framed in by the vine-wreathed window.

CHAPTER XII.

REST.

AS soon as the girls had driven away Miss Abigail bustled about, upon hospitable thoughts intent, and soon had the guest seated at the table, enjoying the meal she had prepared for her.

It was as acceptable as Miss Abigail had thought, for in the excitement of getting started Mrs. Ehrich had scarcely broken her fast, and in truth there had been little enough to eat in the almost empty cupboard. The cup of fragrant tea and its accompaniments were an unusual luxury, and, much to Miss Abigail's alarm, Mrs. Ehrich acted as if she were about to again embrace the hand that was ministering to her wants, and Miss Abigail flew about in a more wren-like fashion than ever, that she might be out of the way of danger.

Mrs. Ehrich perceived at last that her hostess did not understand the way in which she relieved her overcharged heart, and she refrained from all manifestations of gratitude except broken words of thanks.

After she had concluded her meal she wanted to help Miss Abigail wash the breakfast things

and clear the table, but the good woman would not hear of this. In her eyes her guest looked only fit for bed, she was so thin and feeble. Returning to her high-pitched tones, she said to her, with emphatic gestures and very distinct utterance,

“You sit in chair. You rest. I can do this.”

Mrs. Ehrich yielded, and sat in the broad, low, rush-bottomed rocking-chair upon the cosey porch, letting her eyes rest upon the tranquil river and listening to the song of the birds, who had nested in those same trees for years and felt as much at home about the little brown house as did Miss Abigail herself.

At last the baby stirred uneasily in his fragrant couch, and the mother's ear heard the little feeble wail. She brought him out on the porch and sat and rocked him there, while he had his meal too, and Miss Abigail, pattering about her work, stopped every now and then to glance out at the pair with a look of supreme content.

“I declare to goodness he looks better already,” she said, as the eyes unclosed and the baby seemed to be enjoying the cool breeze as much as his mother.

“He like it very much,” the mother said, as she caught Miss Abigail's glance, and with a swift gesture she indicated the river, the sky, the

trees, and the roses that nodded at them from the porch-rail.

"I dare say, poor little fellow," answered Miss Abigail, forgetting her shrill tones and speaking in a more natural voice than Mrs. Eh-rich had heard her use before.

Through the rest of the morning the mother sat there, content to rest and drink in the beauty around her, while the peacefulness of the scene stole into her heart.

Meantime the girls stitched busily away, delighted with the account which Christie and Elsie gave them of the woman's gratitude at her reception by Miss Abigail.

"I can just imagine Miss Abby's face when she found her hand being kissed," laughed Louise. "I dare say she set it down as one of the 'play acting' ways of foreigners, but she is so sorry for this poor woman that I don't think she will lay it up against her."

"I am in a hurry to see the baby," Grace said, as she took the last stitches in a little slip of flowered print. "I think we might go out there this afternoon, and take some more of the clothes as an excuse for going, if we feel as if we needed one for overrunning Miss Abigail."

"We will any of us be quite welcome, I can assure you," Christie said. "Miss Abigail is

one of the most hospitable souls in the world, and always enjoys company; besides she knows we all feel a sense of proprietorship in her guests."

"How much are we to pay every week for this woman's board?" asked Ella.

"Well, it's so little that I feel as if we were imposing upon Miss Abigail's goodness of heart in letting her take so much trouble for so small a return," Christie answered; "but you know she is very set in her way, and she named a price that she said would cover all her extra expenses and let her make a little besides, and she wouldn't hear of taking a cent more."

"How much is it? three dollars?" asked Florence.

"No, only two," Christie answered; and as the girls exclaimed in surprise she added apologetically, "I should feel better if we were paying a little more, but she won't let us. There is one good thing, we can certainly keep the baby there all through the hot weather if Mrs. Ehrich can stay away from home so long. It would be so nice if they could both go home looking real strong and well."

"We can certainly afford to give them the opportunity, at that rate," Grace said. "Christie, you shall be our treasurer, and we will divide the amount up among us, and each pay our share to

you every week. I am going to give you this now, for I am sure after I break it I shall not be able to keep it very long, and I may be out of funds for a while when this is gone."

She took a crisp two-dollar note from her purse and gave it to Christie, and the others began to search in their pockets for their portemonnaies, that the first payment for Mrs. Ehrich's board might be made at once.

When it was time to disperse, Louise lingered behind, to help Christie put away the work and carry it to a disused closet up stairs which had been set apart for that purpose.

She did not seem in any hurry to take her departure, so Christie took her into her own room, and made her comfortable in the rocking-chair while she dusted and did some little tasks she had not had time to do earlier in the morning, on account of her drive to Miss Abigail's house.

Louise seemed to be in a restless frame of mind and body alike, and she chatted on in such a desultory way that Christie could not fail to notice her preoccupation.

"What *are* you thinking about, Louise?" she asked at last, with a merry laugh, when her companion had replied absently, "I guess so," to an inquiry Christie had made concerning a birthday party which it was rumored was to be given soon.

"Well, I'm rather upset in my mind over a letter I got last night," Louise answered. "Christie, I am going to ask you a question, and of course you need n't answer it if you would rather not, but I am not asking just from idle curiosity. Would you mind telling me why you gave up your trip? Was it for some greater pleasure that you expected to have in some way yourself, or to give some one else pleasure? I want to know because I think your decision will help me about something."

Christie flushed.

"I do n't like to tell you, Louise, just exactly why I did it, because it is somebody else's secret, else I would; and I do n't like to say it was to give some one else pleasure, because that sounds so conceited, but that was the first reason. It seemed to be the 'nexte thyng' that came in my way, and I found that by giving up my trip I could give some one else a great deal more happiness than the trip would give me. Just at the very first it seemed rather a sacrifice, but I am sure that ever since I have enjoyed the other use that I made of the money far more than if I had spent it as I at first intended."

"I wish I was n't selfish," Louise sighed, "or else that I had n't any conscience to bother me when I want to put my own happiness first;

I would have a great deal better time than I do now. Do you ever half wish you were n't a church member, Christie?"

"Why, Louise, what a question!" and Christie looked at her visitor in surprise. "Why, no. I do feel sometimes as if it were a very great responsibility, and I have times of worrying lest my inconsistencies may be keeping some one else away; but I am never sorry. I could n't be."

"I'm not sure that I ever ought to have united with the church," Louise said thoughtfully. "I don't feel as you do; and yet we united at the same communion, and I can remember how happy I was that day. I thought living would be such a grand thing after that; and it's just the same routine of petty, trying things that it always was, and there never are any opportunities for anything but just common-places. I'm disappointed. I suppose the fault is in myself somewhere."

"Don't you think you are disappointed because you expect something more than just the ordinary events of life?" asked Christie. "I have had my times of being dreadfully discontented, and because I could n't be somebody great and wonderful, it did n't seem worth while to live at all except just for my own pleasure. Dear Aunt Patience used to help me very much, and I

don't think I shall ever forget that last talk we had. It will always be an inspiration to me. She explained to me that probably no great opportunities would ever come to me, and that I could do a great deal in the way of usefulness and help to others by the simple ministry of 'nexte thynges.' I really believe it is harder to do just these little bits of things than great deeds. If one has an opportunity to do some heroic deed, there is a sort of inspiration about it that makes it easier to do; but these little things that come to one in the day's routine are n't apt to be at all inspiring; and unless you think of them as service for Christ, just as much as great things, since they are what he has appointed for us, it is a burden to do them instead of a joy."

"But do you really feel as if these little things counted?" asked Louise.

"Yes, at last I have come to being contented with them, and trying to do each one with all my heart," Christie answered. "I'll give you one instance of what my little things are sometimes, though I expect you will laugh at me. I hate to dust, and when I am down in the parlor with my duster I am always tempted to slight out-of-the-way things. The dust always gathers on the piano legs that stand nearest to the wall, and I used to slight them almost every day because

they were out of sight and I knew no one would know whether I dusted them or not. I know it seems foolish to think that it is really a matter of right and wrong whether I dust them or not, but I really believe it is. It is one of the little trivial duties that are part of my day's work, and it is appointed just as much as if it was something heroic instead of one of the most commonplace things in the world. If I really believe that is something that has been appointed for me, I would not be willing to slight it. I have found real pleasure in thoroughly dusting all the out-of-the-way corners since I have believed that it was the 'nexte thyng' that came to my hand just then."

"I would rather do something that looked larger than these hateful little things, though," Louise said.

"I would too," confessed Christie. "But if God has n't planned great things for us, which is better for us—to do the work he has appointed, even if it is n't quite to our liking, or not to do anything? I have found out something else in my discouraged times, Louise. I found that I could n't, of myself, keep the warm love that I had in my heart at first; I have to keep constantly asking for love, or I should grow cold and indifferent very soon. It is strange that we can't

do such a natural thing as love in return for all that has been done for us without help; but I find that I can't, and perhaps others are the same. I am like the Israelites in the wilderness: I can't lay up a store of love and help that will last me for days ahead. If I don't ask every day for strength for the day's needs, I find that my supply fails utterly. I copied some lines, that Aunt Patience pointed out to me, into my commonplace book. Would you like to hear them, or do n't you like poetry?"

"Did you ever know a schoolgirl who didn't like poetry?" asked Louise, a smile breaking through her thoughtful expression. "Yes, do read it to me."

Christie opened her commonplace book, into which were copied many of her favorite passages, and read,

"Not on the mountain-tops the manna fell,
Caressed by cloudlets, by the sunlight kissed,
So near to heaven that the stern gray peaks
Melted away in tender amethyst;

"Nay, not upon these silent mist-crowned heights,
So far above the hungering multitude
That they could only view with longing eyes
The promised bread of life, the angels' food;

"Nor chalice in the rocky clefts was stored
The daily manna, where the weary feet
Must scale the heights till flesh and spirit failed
And sank exhausted in the noonday heat.

“Not so came down from heaven the daily food,
But scattered 'midst the desert's shining sands,
Where each could freely gather for his needs,
And e'en a child could fill its little hands.

“With each day's journey came the daily bread,
Strengthening and nourishing with angels' food
The weary people ever marching on
Into the desert's dreary solitude.

“E'en so I think the manna falls to-day,
Scattered among the duties small that lie
Like desert sands before our feet each day,
For hourly needs a bountiful supply.

“Not on the peaceful heights sublime and fair
That tower above the plain of daily need,
Nor hidden like wild honey in the clefts,
Gained only by some brave and toilsome deed.

“O hungering soul, stretch forth thine empty hand;
For each day's trials God gives daily grace,
'Tis always close at hand, then trust his love,
And let distrust to sweet content give place.'

“I think this expresses what I want to tell you, and what I have found out in my own experience. Our strength is just like the manna; we have to gather it every day, or it fails us.”

“I have an opportunity to be self-sacrificing in a very ordinary, commonplace way,” said Louise, drawing a letter from her pocket. “I suppose if it was something that would be sounded abroad with a trumpet, I should be quite willing to do it; but as nobody will give me any credit for it, or, even if they know of it, think

that I have done anything but my duty, I just feel disposed to hush my conscience up and consult only my own happiness."

"I don't believe you would consult your happiness by hushing up your conscience as you threaten to do," said Christie, smiling.

"I may as well tell you what it is, since I am making you my mother confessor this morning," said Louise. "Aunt Belle has taken a cottage at the beach this summer, and in this letter she says she has room for just one more, although she is pretty well crowded already. She wants me to come and spend two or three weeks with her, and tells what fun the girls are having; then, just as an afterthought, she tucks in this little sentence, which has quite spoiled the delight with which I read the invitation: 'I do wish your poor mother could get away for a little rest this summer, but I suppose that it's quite out of the question.' Of course mother would think it was wholly out of the question. She hasn't had a vacation in ten years, to my certain knowledge, and sometimes I look at her in perfect wonder when she goes on so patiently, as if she never cared for anything better than looking after the house, taking care of us, and walking after Kitty, who is the most stupid and vexatious girl that ever lived. It's one of the

penalties of being poor and having a large family that you can't have decently trained help. It's my cross that either some one of the family has to keep jumping up from the table to bring forgotten articles, or else Kitty will appear with her sleeves rolled up, a smudge of soot on her nose, and a general air of preoccupation and soap-suds about her."

"Poor Louise!" said Christie, laughing as Louise wrought herself up to this climax in mock despair.

"Now, if I wanted to, which I pause here to say I emphatically *don't*," Louise continued, "I could take charge of the house, and make mother go to Aunt Belle's for a couple of weeks at least for a rest; and I know she'd enjoy it immensely, and so would Aunt Belle; but I can't make up my mind to undertake such a dreadful responsibility, and in this hot weather too. Of course I know it's just as hot for mother as it is for me; but when people are always patient and cheerful, and never think of mentioning that they have any feelings except those of gratitude that they are permitted to wear themselves out for their numerous family, one is apt to take it for granted that they don't particularly mind things which are uncomfortable. Of course it's a shame, and if I had a scrap of decent daugh-

terly affection I'd bundle mother off before she had time to realize what was going on. I do love her best of any one in the world, but my selfishness prevents me from showing it, you see. Do you suppose it's my 'nexte thyng' to do this, Christie Gilbert?"

"I don't want to give you disagreeable advice," said Christie, "but—"

"Oh, yes, I knew you'd think I ought to," interrupted Louise in despair. "Disagreeable things are always the things that ought to be done. I suppose I'd never do anything that I wanted to or that was pleasant, if I did as I ought. I hate that word ought. Well, now that I am all upset over it, and have at the bottom of my heart the profound conviction that I shall be a selfish pig if I go myself, and let poor mother stay at home and have all the hard times without even the little help I give her, I suppose I may as well make up my mind to do as I ought; but I don't feel any nice little glow of self-approval over it. I just feel as if it was a part of my usual selfishness. I don't want to go, because my conscience will bother me all the time if I do, and so I do the least disagreeable thing and stay at home."

"I wont let you abuse yourself that way," Christie interposed. "It will be lovely and gen-

erous in you to stay at home; and I do think that, after the first disappointment is over, you will be happy in thinking that your mother is having a rest and change. When you see how happy it will make her just to think of going, you will feel repaid right away."

"Well, I will try and work myself up into such an enthusiastic state on my way home that she will think the greatest pleasure of my life will be in getting rid of her for a couple of weeks," said Louise, rising to go reluctantly, for she loved to linger in Christie's blue nest of a room, where everything was so quiet and cool and meddlesome little fingers never left their traces.

"Christie, I wish I was you," she said impulsively, putting her arms around her friend. "It always seems so easy for you to do just right, and you are in earnest with your religion without being priggish and disagreeable. I always feel as if I was in a clearer atmosphere when I'm with you, and you make me disgusted with my own selfish ways. Good-by, dear. If mother goes, you must come and comfort me sometimes."

"We'll all come and help you," Christie returned, as she went down to the gate with her friend.

"It will be coöperative housekeeping in good earnest then," laughed Louise. "Well, I'll begin at once to get intensely enthusiastic, if the thermometer will permit me, and I'll convince mother that go she must. If I don't have the approval of my conscience afterward, I shall lay it up against you, Christie, for giving me bad advice, instead of encouraging me to do my own way and have a good time."

"You must n't give me the credit of your decision," Christie rejoined. "You decided yourself, and deserve every bit of the praise. I am not afraid that you will regret it. Good-by."

"Good-by," Louise answered, and putting up her parasol she started homeward, trying to think only of the pleasure which the patient, tired mother would feel at the prospect of a holiday.

CHAPTER XIII.

ACHSAH.

CHRISTIE heard frequently from Achsah during the weeks that followed Commencement night, happy letters full of the pleasant times she was having, of the satisfaction of Mrs. Eshleman with her young teacher, and of the affection existing between her and her little charge. The last of these letters had brought a little shadow to Christie's face, and Saturday afternoon she read it over again, with a vague impulse beginning to take shape in her mind. There had been a little of the old-time defiance in the spirit of this letter; Achsah had written bitterly of the trials that had been sent to her, and spoken as if her present happiness was the result of her own energy and ambition and Christie's timely assistance. There was no acknowledgment of the love which had guided her steps even when she thought herself most alone, and which had led her into pleasant paths.

"I feel as if my life was in my own hands now," she wrote, "and I can make of it what I

will in spite of circumstances. My ambition to make a success of my life is the strongest part of me, and I am determined that I will. I begin to feel that I have capabilities, and that if I work hard, I may have great possibilities before me; and I hope that some day, Christie dear, you may have reason to be proud of the friend who was so utterly discouraged and desolate when you came to her with your friendship."

Christie realized sadly that Achsah had left God out of account, and was glorying in the fact that she had determined to live her life without him.

Two short poems, cut from magazines and signed A. H. H., were inclosed in the letter, and as Christie read them she wondered that her schoolmates had never realized until Commencement night how gifted Achsah was.

"If her talents were only consecrated, there would be so much that she might do," she thought wistfully. "I wish I could share my feelings with her. I don't think she believes people are ever in earnest in what they profess; and she sees all the failures and inconsistencies of professing Christians, without knowing anything about the times when they conquer themselves. I suppose some of my sins are helping her to keep away from Christ. I wish I could

tell her how sorry I am, and how much I wish that she would become a Christian."

It was very hard for Christie to speak even to those whom she loved best, and who she knew were in sympathy with her, about religious matters, and although she was not afraid of angering Achsah, as she knew others had done by speaking to her of her soul, yet she shrank from it with all a girl's shyness. Two or three times she had heard Achsah speak with indignation of the "meddlesome interference," as she termed it, of those who had spoken to her about uniting with the church at a time when many of her classmates were publicly professing Christ. "They would n't lift their little finger to do anything for me, and yet they presume to meddle with my personal affairs," she had said hotly.

Christie felt sure that if she could bring herself to write to Achsah of the desire with which her heart was overflowing to-day, she would not look upon it as interference, for she knew Christie was sincerely her friend, and would do, as she had already done, a great deal for her happiness; but would it do any good?

It would cost a great effort on her part, but she was quite willing to make it, if only she could feel sure that it would result in the good she wanted to accomplish. Would it draw Ach-

sah any nearer to the Saviour she herself loved so dearly, if she should open to her the inner chamber of her heart?

She pondered the question long and earnestly. She felt a strange yearning, which she dared not leave unheeded, to plead with her friend and urge her to go to Jesus for that peace and joy which no gratification of ambition could bring to her proud, restless spirit; and yet she was so fearful of failure that she dreaded to make the attempt. Was this another "nexte thyng," one of the little duties that God had placed in her path?

"Moment by moment,
Let down from heaven,
Time, opportunity,
Guidance, are given."

Perhaps this was just the time at which she might influence Achsah, and this strong desire was to be her guidance in the path of duty.

She opened her secretary and drew out paper, pen, and ink, then she sat for a time lost in thought. How could she word her note so that Achsah would understand the humility and love with which she wrote it, not as one who felt herself better than another, but just as a very human, erring girl, who wanted her friend to share the strength and help which she had found for herself?

A swift prayer for help and guidance went up from the depths of her heart, and then she took up her pen and wrote, just as she would have spoken, timidly and lovingly. Achsah's eyes could not rest upon the lines without knowing what an effort they had cost, and yet surely the love that prompted the words would win them some consideration.

It was an earnest appeal, but as Christie read it over her eyes filled with tears of disappointment. How little she had said after all, and how empty her words were! Surely it would be worse than useless to send the letter, unless God's blessing should go with it and he should use the feeble words to his glory.

Throwing herself upon her knees by her bedside, she spread the letter out before the Lord, like Hezekiah of old, and told him the burden that rested upon her heart. Never since the day when she had been so sorely oppressed with her own burden of guilt and her sense of estrangement from the Saviour had she prayed so earnestly and with so strong a sense of her own powerlessness. She felt comforted when she arose from her knees, for she had carried her burden to One who was all-powerful, and she knew that if it was his will he could use her words to touch Achsah's heart. So the letter went on its way, sped with

prayer, and Christie trusted the results with the Lord.

The letter found Achsah in an unusually discontented mood. She was sitting alone in her comfortable room at the large hotel where they were spending a few days, with her portfolio upon her knee. Usually she was very happy and contented, and had no desire to change anything in her present lot; but this afternoon a perverse spirit of discontent had possessed her, and there was the old-time look of impatient fretfulness upon her face.

Through Mrs. Eshleman's kindness she had several hours to herself every day, and so she was able to study systematically, much to her pleasure. That lady was very much interested in the young girl, and was anxious that she should have every opportunity to develop her talents and make the best of herself.

Many a one might have seen much to envy in Achsah's lot. Gentle little Ruth was such a winning child that no one could help loving her, and she was an intelligent pupil, whom it was a pleasure to instruct; Mrs. Eshleman was always kind and courteous, and seemed to enjoy giving Achsah all the pleasure that she could; and this delightful flitting from place to place had all the charm of novelty to the young girl, whose life

heretofore had been almost dreary in its monotony.

An ambition to make herself a name as a writer had seized her, and she expressed her restless cravings and unattained ideals in verse, which, if it was oftentimes crude, still showed marks of such thought and feeling that she had had great reason for encouragement in its acceptance by periodicals which did not often open their pages to unknown writers. The untried path which stretched before her looked as if it might be flower-strewn and pleasant to tread, and yet notwithstanding all her grounds for hopefulness she felt unusually depressed.

When Christie's letter was brought up to her she took it eagerly, pleased to recognize the familiar writing upon the envelope, and hoping that its contents would drive away the fit of blues.

A look of surprise crossed her face as her glance travelled swiftly over the lines, and when she had finished it her eyes were misty with tears which the loving words had called forth. The subject of religion had never been mentioned to her before without arousing her resentment and annoyance. * She was too reserved to imagine being able to speak of anything which she should hold sacred if it was her possession, and when

people who had never manifested any other interest in her urged her to unite with the church, she did not believe either in the sincerity of their own professions or in their expressions of interest in her.

Christie had been too true a friend for her to doubt the reality of her desire that she should become a Christian, and she could read between the lines the effort the words had cost. She knew, too, that Christie was very sincere and earnest in her Christian life, and that her first aim was to do right. After she had united with the church Achsah had watched her closely, as she had the others, but even Christie's occasional failures had not shaken her belief in her earnestness of purpose, and since she had learned to know her well she had noted many a little sacrifice of self, many a little victory won "in His name," which had had its influence upon her for good. A great desire to know something of this peace of which Christie wrote filled her heart. It was so disturbed with restless longings and ambitions that rest seemed a great and desirable good.

"Dear Christie," she murmured softly. "It is so easy for her to be everything that is noble and good. She has not my pride and perversity to fight against, and she is not feverish with ambition as I am. I wish I could be just like her,

instead of being my tiresome self. I would like to be a Christian if only to please her, but how can I believe what I don't believe? If I had not seen so much empty profession I might think that religion was something real and powerful and be tempted to believe in it."

It was the same argument with which she had satisfied herself many times before, but this afternoon it was not as convincing as usual. Her reason told her that others' failures would not serve as an excuse for her neglect; and, besides, she could not deny that the motive power which led her father and mother to leave their congenial home in the East to seek the desolate frontier was a real and powerful one. She could not doubt their sincerity, and child though she had been when they were taken away from her, she could remember many an earnest prayer that had been uttered at her bedside by her mother's lips, and her father's good-night benedictions.

Those prayers and words of blessing had lost their power over her during the last troubled years of her life, but this afternoon they came back to her and wound themselves about her like strong cords.

The Spirit was striving with that proud and wilful heart, and the constraining love of Christ broke down all the barriers that she would fain

have erected. She folded Christie's letter up and returned it to the envelope with loving fingers, and tried to banish the subject from her mind, but it lingered persistently. Little Ruth came in search of her, and she drew the child to her side and spent the hour until supper-time in weaving quaint fairy stories for her, but underneath ran the chain of thought from which she could not free herself.

After supper she enjoyed a drive with Mrs. Eshleman, and did her best to be a bright, entertaining companion; but she could not entirely throw aside her preoccupation, and it was a relief when the time came for her to go to the solitude of her own room.

She dimly realized that a crisis had come in her life, that she was brought face to face with a vital question, which could not be thrust aside unanswered; and though she shrank from a decision, she knew that she could not avoid it.

"Jesus of Nazareth, what have I to do with thee?"

She dared not answer, "Nothing;" it was too terrible a decision; and yet she was not willing to lay aside her pride and yield to the meek and lowly One.

The hours crept slowly away as she sat in the quiet moonlight in her room. Each moment her

sense of unrest grew harder to bear, and she longed more and more for the great peace of which Christie had told her; and yet, strange as it may seem, when she had but to ask and receive, she crept away to bed at last with her burden, and tossed restlessly through the long hours of the night without yielding to the impulse that bade her carry it to her Saviour's feet.

Achsah arose in the morning weary and unrefreshed in body and mind, and was glad that she could plead a headache to Mrs. Eshleman as an excuse for her weariness and languor. She was impatient with herself because she could not force herself to be interested in her usual pursuits, and was half angry with Christie for writing the letter which had wrought such havoc with her peace. When she went to her room in the afternoon she was too restless to write or even to take the rest that she needed after her vigil of the night before, so putting on her hat she determined to walk off her restlessness. She wandered aimlessly through the streets of the pretty village until she came to a picturesque little stone chapel, overgrown with vines which even climbed aspiringly up the slender spire and wreathed themselves about the cross which surmounted it.

The door was open, and the low notes of an organ invited Achsah to leave the outdoor sun-

shine and seek a rest in the cool, dark interior of the edifice. She wondered if a service was being held, but when she stepped inside the door she found that the only other occupants of the church were in the organ loft.

The young girl who sat before the organ began a low plaintive prelude, and Achsah sank into an unobserved corner to listen to the music.

"Come unto Me," began a clear voice, liquid with sweetness, and music-loving Achsah held her breath to listen, that she might not lose a syllable. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Over and over again the singer repeated the sweet words, and the melody made them stir the depths of Achsah's heart. She knelt down in the dark pew and bowed her head upon the cushion, too weary and heavy laden to carry her burden any longer. She had left her room to escape the Spirit's pleading, and then had wandered unconsciously into this place, where the Saviour's gentle invitation came to her more strongly than ever.

"Come unto Me and I will give you rest."

The sweet voice repeated the words again, lingering tenderly upon them, and Achsah gave up her struggle.

"I come to Thee," she whispered. "With all my pride and sinfulness, just as I am, without one plea except my great need. Wilt Thou accept me and forgive me, for Jesus' sake?"

With the consciousness of full surrender came the answer to her prayer, and over her troubled heart stole a peace which quieted every unrest.

Long she knelt there, dreading to move lest she should lose some of her new-found blessedness; but at last a stir in the organ-loft warned her that the choir were about to take their departure, so she arose quietly and went out again into the afternoon sunlight, leaving behind her for ever the burden of sin which she had carried into the little church.

If the mother could have known that the prayers which she had uttered for Achsah in those first years of unconscious childhood had been at last fulfilled in God's own way and in his own time, surely a new note of thanksgiving would have been added to the song of the redeemed when the angels shouted for joy over another wanderer returned to the Father's house.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNCONSCIOUS MINISTRY.

It was an oppressively hot Sunday in August. The sea lay as calm and motionless as if it were molten glass beneath the burning rays of the sun, and not a breath was borne across its surface.

Although Mrs. Eshleman's rooms at the hotel were the largest and airiest in the building, yet they were almost unendurable when the afternoon sun began to creep in beneath the awnings.

Little Ruth drooped with the heat, and though Achsah fanned her and did her best to make her forget her weariness, yet she seemed to be as exhausted as a wilted blossom.

"Would you like to go down to the beach, dear?" Achsah asked at last, and the languid eyes brightened at the proposal.

"It would be very hot going down there, but I am sure it would be cool when we once reached the rocks. Yes, I should like to go."

As they started down towards the beach a faint breath now and then crept up from the ocean, stirring the idly pendulous leaves, then ceasing, as if exhausted with its own effort. The

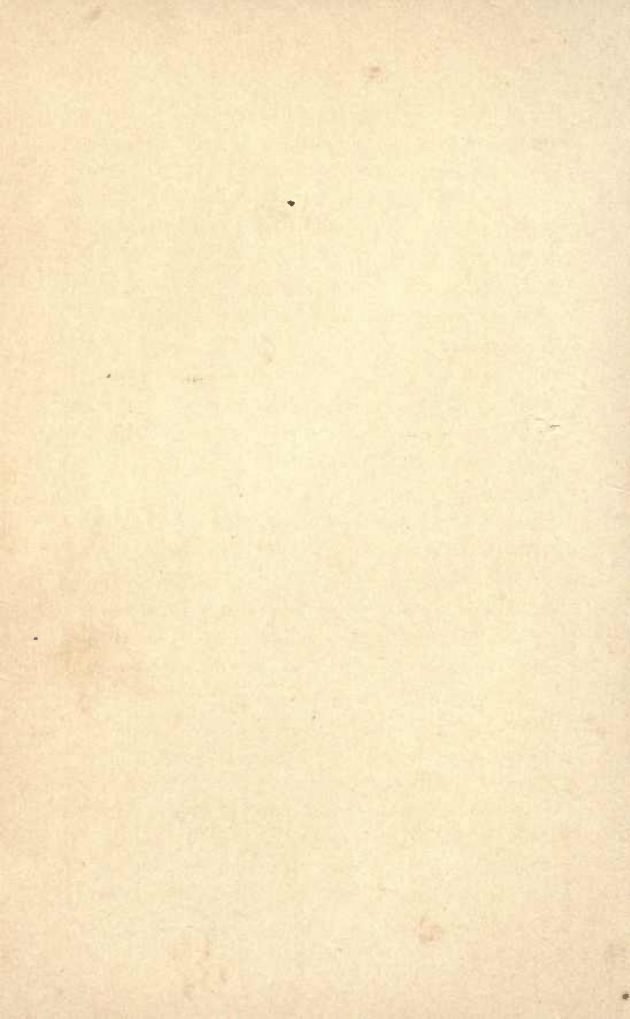
rocks loomed up grandly against the cloudless blue of the summer sky. The sun blazed down as furiously as if it was matching its strength against the strength of those mighty cliffs; but tenderly helping little Ruth along, Achsah soon reached a place of shelter with her little charge, where the shadow of the rock, as they nestled in a great fissure, protected them from the heat of the sun.

"This is nice, isn't it?" said Ruth, with a little sigh of relief, as she nestled down beside Achsah and put her head against her friend's shoulder. "Now wont you tell me a story, Miss Achsah?"

So Achsah began to tell the child the sweet story of the Prodigal Son, which she had herself been reading that morning, all unconscious that she had another auditor.

Just around a curve in the cliff, so near that he could hear every word distinctly, though he could not see the speaker, lay a man in the garb of a fisherman, with a low-browed, sullen face. An ugly bruise on his forehead, and his flushed and swollen features, showed that he was recovering from the effects of a dissipated brawl. He had wandered down to the cliffs sore in body and spirit, and almost determined to end his wretched life. He was watching the incoming tide, and





wondering whether he would summon up resolution enough to let his body drift out to sea when the waters should recede at the ebb tide.

He heard the voices at first without heeding the words, but as Achsah began her story his attention was riveted in spite of himself. He had heard that story before, and he groaned in spirit as he remembered how far away those days of innocent childhood were, when a mother's lips had fashioned the words that a strange voice was uttering now. He could almost catch the scent of the roses that had climbed over the little old-fashioned house, and he could recall the touch of his mother's gentle hand upon his head as he sat beside her when the children were gathered together for their afternoon with the Bible.

"Poor mother!" he thought remorsefully. "I wonder how she is? I wonder if she has forgotten all about me? I was always a bad one, and I should think she would have been glad enough when I took myself off and let the rest have some peace. I'd like to see her again, and father, and Abigail too; but it's a sorry welcome I would get if they could see me now."

"But I should think he would have been afraid to go home after he had been so wicked," said the childish voice. "Suppose his father would n't forgive him, and would send him away after all?"

"But he trusted in his father's love, you see," Achsah said. "He knew his father well enough to believe that if he went to him and told him how sorry he was, he would forgive him. He did not expect to be his son again; he would have been contented to be one of the hired servants, if only he might be at home; so he said, 'I will arise and go unto my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.'"

"But his father did forgive him?" Ruth asked.

"Yes, he was watching and waiting for him to come home, for it says, 'When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him'!"

"How he must have loved his father after that!" Ruth said. "I suppose he was sorry then that he had not gone home sooner."

The curly head slipped down soon upon Achsah's knee, and in a few moments the music of the surf had lulled the child into a gentle slumber.

Achsah sat there with her hand upon the ruffled curls, drinking in the beauty of the scene, content to be alone with her thoughts. Far, far

away as the eye could reach, in seeming infinitude stretched the sea, as blue as the sky that bent over it, calm and unruffled until it reached the rocky New England coast, where it gathered itself up into great rollers and came crashing against the foot of the cliffs, sending up a silvery mist of spray.

"As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The words whispered themselves with new beauty and meaning to Achsah, and nestling in this quiet cranny of the rock, enjoying the cool refuge from the heat of the sun, she realized how perfectly the simile described the overshadowing love of God.

Other sweet Bible words came to her mind. The rock too was a refuge. The angry waters dashed themselves furiously against it, only to be hurled back again and shivered into foam and spray; but, high up in a cleft of the great rock, one could look fearlessly down upon the boiling, tumultuous waves and feel assured that they could not shake that stronghold with their utmost fury.

The sea murmured another message as Achsah's eyes rested upon its pathless waters with their unfathomable depths: "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Far below the surface over which white-winged ships speed

their way, down in the sunless depths which the eyes of man have never seen, where lies the wreck of many a goodly ship, into such depths our sins are cast. No summer drought can expose them to view, but in the depths of the changeless sea they will ever be buried.

Beautiful promise of comfort! We can bring our burden of sin to the Saviour and claim his promise that it shall be cast into the depths of the sea—the sea of God's love, whose depths have never been fathomed, from whence it will not rise to condemn us, even in the great day when the sea shall give up her dead.

The calm, opalescent surface, stretching away until it met the horizon, with its foam edges of glistening silver and feathery spray, brought a thought of the time when the first heaven and the first earth should pass away, and there should be no more sea, but instead of this waste of waters, "a sea of glass like unto crystal" before the throne of God; instead of the roar of the breakers, the anthem of praise that shall cease not, night nor day, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is and is to come," and the chorus of those "who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb:" "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiv-

ing and honor and power and might be unto our God for ever and ever."

Achsah would have been amazed if she could have known how profoundly her simple story had stirred the depths of her unseen hearer's heart. The dear old mother's gentle voice was speaking to him again as it had done in childhood, and he felt strange longings to literally arise and go to his father and his home again. He could not doubt but that a welcome would be waiting for him as it had for the prodigal in the parable. A dull yearning for a higher forgiveness stirred his heart, but he thought he would be content if he could only be taken back into the home of his boyhood again. He arose at last and crept quietly away, with no more thought of ending the life that had been such a miserable failure so far, for it seemed to him that some of his childhood's innocence must come back to him with a return to his childhood's home.

There were others, too, whom he had sorely wronged besides his father and mother. He had persuaded a young girl to leave her home and link her life to his, and then when his short-lived affection for her had waned, he had first quarrelled with her and made her life unbearable with his violent temper, then deserted her

when she was ill and helpless. It had been seven years since he had left his wife and child, and he did not know even whether they were living.

Perhaps, if he found a welcome waiting for him at home, he could trust that a little of his wife's old love for him might still be remaining, and he would search for her and for his child. Visions of what the future might yet hold for him rose up before him, and made him determine to leave his evil life behind him when he turned his steps homeward.

Miss Abigail, nightly putting a light in the window as she had for years, and fervently offering her usual petition for the wanderer's return, did not dream of the near fulfilment of her prayer as she patiently watched and waited; nor did Christie dream of the chain of links by which her influence had at last reached the long-lost brother, through Achsah's unconscious ministry.

She did not realize how strong an influence for good she exerted as she went on in her quiet way, with no great talents or brilliant gifts to exercise; only a faithful performance of the little commonplace duties that came to her hour by hour as "ye nexte thynges." She had given up planning for herself, and was content to follow her Father's guidance.

Louise Rushton had determined to let herself be guided in her acceptance of her aunt's invitation by Christie's reasons for refusing to enjoy her long-talked-of trip, and Christie's unselfishness had struck a responsive chord in her somewhat self-indulgent nature. She had gone home from Christie's that morning quite resolved that her mother should enjoy the trip in her place, but at every step she shrank more and more from taking upon her shoulders the petty cares which she so cordially detested.

Her good resolutions almost vanished when she entered the house, which was so different from Mrs. Gilbert's cool, quiet home, whose tranquillity and order were never disturbed by mischievous little fingers. The house was hot, and an unmistakable odor of a boiled dinner pervaded it. The two-year-old baby was in a fretful mood, and was sitting on the lowest step of the stairway, crying at intervals, and in between times decorating her face with a piece of bread and jelly; and just vanishing up the back stairs Louise caught a glimpse of Kitty retreating with swollen features and a flannel bandage about her face—unmistakable signs that she was about to retire with a toothache for the rest of the day.

"Of course," thought Louise, with a discontented frown. "Kitty must always take a busy

day to have her toothaches. I wish she had n't any teeth, for there's always something the matter with them. I suppose I'd better go and help mother with dinner."

Running up to the room which she shared with a younger sister, Louise quickly exchanged her clean light print dress for a dark calico wrapper, and made her appearance in the kitchen a few moments later.

"What can I do, mother?" she asked cheerfully, as her mother's flushed, tired face looked up with a smile of welcome from the ironing table over which she was bending. "I just saw Kitty retiring from the world, so I suppose there is more to do than usual. Those are her favorite times."

"It does seem so," admitted her mother, "but the poor girl really is suffering, and she did not give up till I sent her off to bed. If you will set the table for dinner, Louise dear, and just see what is the matter with Dottie, so she won't keep on fretting so, I can manage nicely. Dinner is almost ready now, and I can finish these collars and cuffs by the time it is ready to dish."

Louise vanished into the dining-room, which seemed delightfully cool after the odorous heat of the kitchen, and a moment later she had Dot-

tie pattering around after her, her chubby face dimpled with smiles at being allowed to help sister set the table.

When everything was in its place Louise caught Dottie up and carried her to her bedroom.

"I think you'd be quite sweet enough, pet, if you had n't so much jelly on your face," she said merrily; and Dottie submitted cheerfully to the ablutions which were often greeted with noisy remonstrances.

"Now you are a dear clean little girl," said Louise, kissing the rosy cheeks. "But would n't you be a handful to take care of for two whole weeks!"

Dottie laughed at her face of exaggerated despair without at all understanding the words which accompanied it, and trotted down stairs after her sister, quite unconscious of the responsibility which Louise proposed to assume.

"Mother must go," said Louise to herself decidedly. "She needs a rest and change if any one ever did; but oh, how I do hate to take her place!"

She heard the sound of wheels, and glancing through the open door saw her father hitching his buggy in front of the house.

Louise went out to meet him.

"It's a hot day, isn't it, father!" she asked. "Dinner isn't quite ready, so won't you sit down out here on the porch a moment while I talk to you about something? I want you to help me plot a conspiracy against mother," and she drew her aunt's letter from her pocket and placed it in her father's hand. "You see auntie has invited me, but she would rather have mother if she only thought that it would be possible. I know mother will say that of course she can't go; but I want you to persuade her that she really needs the rest. She looks all tired out, and I know it would do her ever so much good, and I can take care of the house just as well as not, if you won't be afraid to trust yourself in my inexperienced hands. We will both insist upon her going, and then she will find it quite out of the question to refuse."

A pleased expression crossed the doctor's careworn face.

"It will be the best thing in the world for her," he answered. "We'll do our best to get along without her, daughter, and the thought of the good the change will do her will make up for our loneliness. You are a good girl to think of it."

"Now I'll go and help get the dinner on," Louise said, pleased with her father's rarely

expressed approval, and she went back into the hot kitchen, where her mother, flushed and perspiring, was taking up the dinner.

When the meal had been concluded and the children had gone back to their play, Louise said,

"Now, mother, father and I have a plan on hand concerning you. We are going to send you down to Aunt Belle's for a couple of weeks, and you must prepare yourself to quietly submit to being turned out of your home, for we are determined to take no refusal."

A sudden gleam of pleasure lit up the tired face, but it vanished in a moment, and Mrs. Rushton said,

"Why, Louise, it would be out of the question. It is years since I have felt as if I could leave the house for a couple of days even, and how could I possibly go for two weeks?"

"Easily enough, mother," Louise answered promptly, "if you would only trust to the abilities of your eldest daughter. I am all through school now, and the next branch of my education is to be a thorough knowledge of practical housekeeping, and I know I can acquire it better by taking your place than in any other way. Indeed you must go, mother, and have a real good time with Aunt Belle. Not even

Dottie is to go with you, so you can be as care-free and merry as a young girl."

"Yes, wife, I am going to insist upon your going," the doctor added. "Louise will help you get started as soon as possible, and you must get everything you need for the trip," and he tossed his well-worn wallet into her lap.

"But," began Mrs. Rushton, quite sure that anything so delightful must be entirely out of the range of her possibilities.

"There are n't any 'buts' about it," insisted Louise, and she was so earnest and determined in her protestations of how easily she could take her mother's place, and how anxious she was to try, that before long Mrs. Rushton found herself acquiescing in the plan, and giving Louise directions what to do about the fruit that had been ordered for preserving, and various other minor matters which she had expected to attend to herself.

While they were washing the dinner dishes Louise and her mother discussed the details of the latter's wardrobe, and the result was that an hour later Mrs. Rushton found herself on her way down town in an unwonted perturbation of mind, actually about to purchase herself a cool travelling suit, which Louise had insisted upon. There were three days of hurried preparation, and then

Mrs. Rushton started away one morning, scarcely realizing that she was bidding farewell to her household cares for a little time, and looking younger and more rested already, just in anticipation of the change before her. She had filled her trunk with a pile of sewing which she had expected to do for the children while she was away, but Louise, detecting her intention, had promptly emptied it out.

"Nothing but light reading and the flimsiest of fancy work shall you touch while you are away on your vacation," she said decidedly. "A nice rest it would be to sit and sew all day! No, indeed, you are to have a real good time for once, so don't let me catch you trying to smuggle any work in."

The mother protested a little, but yielded at last, and Louise had her way in the end. As the train moved out of the station she felt her heart sink at the responsibility she had assumed, and she thought how gladly she would welcome the day that would bring her mother home again; but she reproached herself for the selfishness of shrinking from the treadmill where her mother spent her life, and Dottie diverted her mind from all but the present by clamoring for a pink popcorn ball so loudly that her wants had to be immediately attended to.

During the days that followed Louise learned to appreciate her mother as she never had before. She wondered again and again how her mother had ever managed to keep her sweetness of temper, when she had these little annoyances and vexations to prick her at every turn. The constant planning and contriving necessary to keep the household expenses within the doctor's small income, Kitty's incompetence and heedlessness, the constant demands of the children for some service which they were always used to going "to mother" for, made the days very long and wearisome to poor Louise, who was all unused to these cares.

"I wonder if Kitty could n't manage to get breakfast for once without my watching her all the time," she said to herself one unusually oppressive morning, and instead of going into the kitchen, she indulged herself with a walk in the garden.

She learned her mistake a little later when the family gathered around the table for breakfast.

The oatmeal looked as if it had been carefully cooked, and as Louise helped her father she thought that at all events the first course would be satisfactory. The wry face that greeted the first taste made the children shout with laughter,

while Louise asked anxiously, "What is the matter with it, father? Is it scorched?"

"Taste it and see, daughter," was the answer. And Louise put a spoonful into her mouth to find to her mortification that it was as salt as if it had been made of the strongest brine.

She rang for the rest of the breakfast, resolving to acquaint Kitty with her fault in a way that she would remember.

"Why did n't I go out and see after things myself?" she reflected bitterly, as she poured from the coffee-pot the pale-colored fluid that she knew would not take the place of the cup of good coffee her father always wanted in the morning.

The omelet was a flat, indigestible-looking compound, swimming in grease, the fried potatoes were so thoroughly fried that they were too hard to put a fork into, and had to be chased pertinaciously around the plate before they could be captured, and then Dottie complained that her potatoes "were bony, and she could n't bite them."

The rolls that had been put in the oven to be warmed over were dried through and scorched, and with burning cheeks Louise saw her father try in vain to eat one thing after another, until at last he pushed his chair back from the table.

"Oh, father, I'm so sorry," Louise said apologetically, knowing that he had seen her strolling around the garden when she should have been attending to the morning meal.

"Well, never mind, daughter," he said kindly, though he was tempted to be a little out of patience at losing his breakfast. "We can't expect to find old heads on young shoulders, and you have been doing bravely, considering how new it all is to you. I'll stop at the dairy and get a glass of milk on my way out of town, and you can have dinner an hour earlier, for I think we'll all be ready for it."

Notwithstanding her father's kindness, Louise was sorely mortified at the utter failure of the breakfast. The children protested that there was not anything that they could eat, and that they must have something else. The bread-box, Louise knew, was empty, so she promised to make them some mush if they would wait patiently for a little while and go out to play, and then, taking the oatmeal dish in her hand, she went out into the kitchen.

"Open your mouth, Kitty," she said sternly, and the unsuspecting Kitty obeyed. Louise put a large tablespoonful of the oatmeal in the widely stretched mouth, and enjoyed the grimaces which the girl made as she swallowed it.

"What sort of cooking do you call that?" asked Louise. "I should think, Kitty, that you might know enough, after all mother's teaching, to cook oatmeal properly. What on earth did you put so much salt in it for? Nobody could eat a mouthful."

"Well, you see," explained Kitty, "I could n't quite remember whether I had salted it, when I was ready to dish it, so I salted it again, just to make sure anyhow. I thought too much would be better than none at all."

"Could n't you have tasted it?" demanded Louise.

"Ah, sure now I never thought of that at all, at all," responded the imperturbably good-humored Kitty.

"Well, I wish you would learn to think sometimes and pay a little attention to what you are about," said Louise. "There was not one thing on the table that was fit to eat, and father had to go off without a mouthful of breakfast. Now you can bring the things out here, while I make some mush for the children. I'll never trust you again to get a meal."

"Sure if you want a thing done well, the best way is to look after it yourself," returned the unabashed Kitty. "Your ma always does, and then she's sure that nothing went wrong."

Louise had no answer to make to this wholly true though not very palatable remark, and she devoted herself to making the mush for the children, who danced about the kitchen door, clamoring to know when it would be done, and seeming to regard the utter failure of the first breakfast as a huge joke.

"Poor mother, I don't wonder she looked so tired," thought Louise, as at last breakfast was over and she set herself busily to work at the small tasks that were awaiting her, trying by increased faithfulness now to make up for her morning negligence. "I do mean to try and help her more after this, for it is too bad for her to have all the bother resting upon her all the time, and it must be as hard for her as it is for me."

In the meantime the mother had not forgotten the cares which she knew were pressing heavily upon the young shoulders, notwithstanding Louise's bright and cheerful letters; but she was gathering strength for her duties when she should return with every inhalation of the strengthening sea breeze, while with her freedom from anxiety there came a brightness to her eyes and a color to her cheek that had been missing for years.

CHAPTER XV.

NEXTS.

BENEATH Miss Abigail's hospitable roof the guests were thriving on their plain, wholesome fare and the fresh pure air. Mrs. Ehrich's thin cheeks were growing fuller, and she was developing into a hopeful, energetic little woman as her health and strength came back to her. Every day made a difference in the baby's appearance, and he was growing plump and rosy, with a lusty cry that was very different from the feeble wail of his first arrival, and now and then a little cooing sound that delighted his mother's heart.

"You don't know the pleasure and company it is to have that baby in the house, to say nothing of his mother," Miss Abigail said to Christie one day, as she walked down to the gate to meet her, with the baby cuddled up in her strong arms as cosily as if she had held babies all her life. "He's such a dear little fellow and takes so much notice of everything. It's made me more thankful for my mercies, having them here, too, Miss Christie. I used to get lonesome streaks, and think it was

hard lines for me to be left here without a chick or child in the world, except Tim, and I'm most past looking for him now. Seems to me mother's prayers would have brought him home before now if he was coming. Well, as I was saying, I had my spells of studying on what I had n't got, and so I lost sight sometimes of all I had got; but since that poor woman's been here, and I've seen what a treat just the river and the birds and the trees are to her, I have made up my mind to remember only the good things that I have, as free as air, and not take stock in worrying. It would be hard to have little children growing up around you in one of those alleys, where they could n't be half taken care of nor could n't even get a breath of pure air. There's far worse things than have ever come to me, and I'm getting to realize it more and more every day. I wish I could have some one else here that needs a change. I have plenty of room, and it would do my heart good to see some one else enjoying this beautiful river besides the baby and his mother. If you know of any one else they will be very welcome, Miss Christie."

It was this conversation, and the money that lay carefully folded up in Christie's "tenth-box" ready for use, that made her wish for some opportunity to add to Miss Abigail's household.

The girls had shared Mrs. Ehrich's expenses, so Christie still had some money left from her fifty dollars, with which she wanted to make some one happy when the opportunity came to her.

She wrote to an old friend, who had formerly been a teacher at Maplewood Institute, and was now living in the city, telling her of her wish to help some one who was in need of the benefit of fresh air and a change. She knew that Mrs. Elliott taught in a mission school and was interested in several charitable organizations, so she hoped that she would be able to advise her wisely, and suggest some one who really needed assistance.

Very promptly the answer came, and a very satisfactory one it was to Christie.

"Your letter came to me as a direct answer to my earnest prayers," Mrs. Elliott wrote. "I have been very much interested in a young woman who has been attending my mothers' meeting for some time. She has had a very hard life the last few years, and one of bitter disappointment. She confesses that it is trouble that she has brought upon herself, but it is none the less hard to bear. In fact I think it is often easier to bear troubles which God sends us than those which we bring upon ourselves by our own wilfulness and wrongdoing. She had a pleasant home and good pa-

rents, but about eight years ago she became infatuated with a young man who, according to her own confession, was wild and dissipated, and ran away from home with him. It was a most unhappy marriage, for he was a selfish, unprincipled fellow, who was not capable of any real affection for her. His feelings towards her were rather those of admiration for her pretty face and bright ways than anything else, and after he had won her he soon tired of these attractions. Perhaps it was partly the wife's fault, too, for she was a vain, giddy girl, who did not hesitate to put her parents' wishes and commands at defiance, and repay all their love and care by leaving them for a man of whom they could not approve. There was not very much in her to call out the best and highest affections of a man's nature, and after a few weeks both husband and wife quarrelled bitterly. At the end of a year of mutual unhappiness he deserted her, leaving her with a little daughter but a few weeks old to care for as best she might. She went back to her father and mother, and they opened their home again to her; but their hearts had been broken when she left them, and before a year had passed she had seen them both laid away to rest. This left her alone in the world except for her little daughter, for she had heard nothing from

her husband since he left her, and she believes him dead. It has been a hard struggle for her to earn bread for herself and her child, and when I heard her story I became very much interested in her. She was induced to attend the mothers' meetings, and has learned at last to whom to go for help with her burdens: but she stands very much in need of human help and sympathy just now. She has been ill for some time and is not able to work, and the little girl, who is a delicate child, is beginning to droop too. A little time of rest in the pure air is what she most needs, and I have been praying that just such a chance might be open to her. God has sent his answer through you, my dear girl, and in poor Mrs. Harmer's name I most gladly accept your invitation. If you have room for both mother and daughter, it will be a double pleasure to them not to be separated; but if not, perhaps I can get a ticket for little Naomi to go to one of those seaside homes for children. Let me hear when you want your guest or guests, and I will make arrangements to send them to you at any date you mention."

Mrs. Gilbert shared Christie's pleasure over this letter, and after a conversation with Miss Abigail, she wrote to Mrs. Elliott, asking her to send Mrs. Harmer and her daughter to them as soon as possible.

The very next day they came, and Christie was at the station to meet them, full of pleased expectancy. Mrs. Harmer was still a pretty woman, though her years of anxiety and her illness had made her face look thin and careworn. Christie was at once attracted to the child, a delicate, interesting looking little girl, who lifted her dark eyes to Christie, when she welcomed her, with such a look of shy gratitude that Christie could not forbear stooping and kissing the pretty lips that parted in a smile of pleasure.

Both mother and daughter enjoyed the drive out to Miss Abigail's, and Christie enjoyed their exclamations of pleasure over the river and the white-winged vessels which were flitting before the wind.

"This is Mrs. Harmer, Miss Abigail," Christie said, as the little old lady came briskly out to meet her guests, the very impersonation of cheery hospitality.

"Harmer! why, that is my name, too," Miss Abigail said, as she shook hands with her guest. "And what's your name, little one?"

"Naomi," the child answered shyly, glancing up into the kindly face.

"Why, that was my mother's name!" said Miss Abigail, her voice taking a softer tone as she spoke of her mother. "I declare to goodness, I

shall have to believe you're both relations of mine with those names. Well, you're doubly welcome, and I hope you'll enjoy yourselves here. There's a dear little baby for you to play with, Naomi, if you're fond of babies. When I was your size I liked them better than dolls, a good sight." Naomi smiled at the baby and touched her finger to its round cheek, while Mrs. Ehrich looked pleased at this attention to her baby.

Miss Abigail ushered Mrs. Harmer up to her room under the eaves, and the cosy little room looked like a haven of rest to the tired and discouraged woman. She sank into the old arm-chair that stood beside the window, with a little sigh of relief, when Miss Abigail left her, and Christie, coming up a little later, found her sitting there with her hands clasped and a smile of content on her face.

"I wish I could thank you, Miss Gilbert," she said. "I cannot tell you what a blessed rest this will be to me. It is just what I wanted so sorely, and I have not deserved that the Lord should care for my needs and lead me beside the still waters."

"Indeed, I feel that it is a privilege to be His instrument in answering prayer," Christie said gently, "and you must not thank me for what I find it a pleasure to do."

"There must be a blessedness in knowing that you can give new life and hope to one who is almost discouraged," answered Mrs. Harmer, looking wistfully at the bright young face that looked into her own. Perhaps she was thinking of the time when she too was young and pretty, and when her life was carefully guarded and sheltered by loving parents. She had thrown away much that she might gratify her self-will and misplaced affection, and it was almost too late now to retrieve the mistakes of the past and redeem the future. She was so alone in the world but for little Naomi, and care though the child was, yet she more than repaid every self-denial for her sake, she was so clinging and affectionate.

Miss Abigail was very much pleased with her new guests, and before the evening meal was ended Naomi had forgotten her shyness, and every now and then burst into a merry ripple of childish laughter over some of the antics of Miss Abigail's kitten, who played with its grave old mother's tail and ears in a manner that shocked the sober old cat.

"Is she your only child?" asked Miss Abigail, watching Naomi as she strayed down towards the gate, her slight childish figure making a pretty picture as she played with the kitten which followed her, glad of a new playmate.

"Yes, she is the only child I ever had," Mrs. Harmer answered.

"Is your husband dead?" Miss Abigail inquired. By this time Naomi had returned to the porch, and Mrs. Harmer answered after a moment's hesitation,

"Naomi lost her father when she was only a few weeks old;" then when after a few moments Naomi had gone away again, she said, "I have never told her the whole truth, and she thinks her father is dead; but I do not want to deceive you. My husband left me when Naomi was a little baby and I have never heard anything of him since. I do not know whether he is living or not."

"He must have been a bad man to go off and leave his wife and child," said Miss Abigail. "You must have been but a young bit of a thing then, for you don't look much but a girl now."

"I was only seventeen when I was married," Mrs. Harmer answered, "but I have had trouble enough to make me feel much older than my years. If it was not for Naomi I should not want to live; but for her sake I am very glad of this rest and the chance to grow strong and well again."

"Naomi is an unusual name," said Miss Abigail.

"Yes, it was the name of my husband's mother, and he wanted it given to his child," Mrs. Harmer answered, stroking the dark curly head of the little girl, who was sitting at her feet now with her head resting against her mother's knee.

"I expect you are tired after your journey, little girl," said Miss Abigail, looking with kindly eyes at the flushed face and heavy eyes. "I'll read a chapter in the good Book, and we will make an early start to bed and get up early. These summer mornings are too beautiful to spend in sleep."

Naomi was very willing to go to bed, and half an hour later her mother followed her, and at an early hour all the occupants of the little cottage were in the land of dreams.

The days sped all too swiftly to the visitors, and Miss Abigail often said she did not know how she could ever reconcile herself to parting with Naomi and the baby, they had won her heart so completely.

Even the oppressive heat of the August days did not seem to be overpowering here, where breezes from the river stole into the little cottage, and the fresh pure air, laden with the fragrance of flowers and the melody of the birds, seemed to bring new life to Mrs. Harmer and Naomi. The little girl delighted in making herself useful in

childish ways, and she was quite proud when she could be intrusted with commissions to the village store. She had grown so strong that the walk, although somewhat of a long one, did not tire her out at all, and she enjoyed her feeling of importance in taking so much of an expedition alone.

One afternoon Miss Abigail was in need of some small articles from the village store, and Naomi pleaded to be allowed to go and get them.

"I'm afraid it's too hot for you, child," Miss Abigail said doubtfully; but Naomi coaxed to be allowed to go, saying that she would take her mother's umbrella to shield her from the sun, and that there would be a breeze by the river nearly all the way.

Miss Abigail let her have her way at last, and Naomi started off triumphantly, taking the umbrella with her as a protection against the heat of the sun.

The heat increased after she had started, and the breeze died away completely, and Naomi almost wished that she had not begged to come, as she felt the gathering oppressiveness. She discharged her errand and started towards home, not noticing the heavy bank of clouds that had loomed up in the sky nor the singular stillness which often precedes a storm. The leaves on the

trees hung pendulous without a motion, and it would have been evident to eyes more experienced than little Naomi's that a storm was brewing.

A heavy peal of thunder startled the child and great drops of rain pattered down slowly, the advance guard of a coming deluge. Naomi raised her umbrella and quickened her steps, but a gust of wind nearly blew her over. She was not a timid child, but she was a little frightened at finding herself facing the storm on this lonely river road, so far from home, and tears came to her eyes as she put down her umbrella and tried to force her way along against the wind.

She was passing a little copse of trees when a sound reached her ears that made her pause to listen, while her heart beat a little faster.

Surely those were the sound of groans, as of some one in distress. She went timidly towards the clump of trees, and peering into the shadows descried a man lying upon the ground, with his face in the moss.

He was evidently in pain, for as Naomi looked at him she heard him groan again. The child's first impulse was to run away, and she went several rods before she paused to look back. She had a childish fear of tramps, and there was nothing in this man's rough appearance to in-

spire her with any confidence. She paused to look back, and saw him feebly dragging himself out of the covert of the underbrush and trying to gain the road.

"He must be sick, poor man," said Naomi pitifully, as she saw his uncertain gait, which did not seem like the stagger of an intoxicated man, although it was nearly as undetermined. He had not gone many paces before his strength gave out and he fell again. Naomi stood and looked at him. The wind was growing higher each moment, the air was full of flying leaves and dead twigs, and the rain was beginning to fall in earnest.

Naomi did not know whether to run towards home as speedily as possible, or go back and see if she could be of any assistance to the poor man. She was half afraid of him, and she wanted to seek the refuge of home as speedily as possible, but her tender heart forbade her leaving any one who was in distress.

She retraced her footsteps and leaned over the man, who was groaning again.

"Are you sick?" she asked gently.

The man opened his eyes and looked at her with a vacant gaze. She touched his hand and found he was burning with fever, and she shrank away from him for a moment.

"It seems longer than it used to," he said indistinctly. "Mother will be wondering why I don't come, and it's getting late. Tell her I am coming. I will arise and go—" and his voice died away in unintelligible murmurings.

The thunder crashed loudly, and Naomi shuddered with terror. Mother had told her it was God's voice, but it frightened her to hear it in this lonely place with this sick man. It was very different when she was nestled in the safe shelter of mother's arms.

She would not go away and leave the poor man alone, lying here in the middle of the road with the rain beating down upon him. With considerable difficulty she raised the umbrella, and shielded the man's face at least from the fury of the rain, which was now coming down in torrents, while she herself crept under the same shelter.

It was not as hard to hold the umbrella now that it was close to the ground, and Naomi kept it quite steadily in its place. Would the rain ever stop, she wondered drearily, as it came down in great sheets, while the wind nearly took her breath away.

If she was only safely home! and she sobbed softly to herself as she shivered with the wet and cold. The rain and wind did not seem to abate

the burning fever of the sick man, and his incoherent mutterings frightened the child. At last the storm spent itself and the rain began to slacken in its heavy downpour. Rifts of blue sky gleamed out through the clouds and the distant rumble of the thunder showed that the storm had passed over that part of the country.

Naomi looked wistfully along the road. She would not go and leave her self-imposed charge until some one came who could take care of him. Patiently she sat by his side, wondering why the road seemed so entirely deserted that afternoon. It seemed a long time to the child, though in reality it was not an hour, before she heard the approaching rattle of wagon wheels and knew that some one was coming at last.

It was an empty farm-wagon, and the driver, a stout, well-grown boy of eighteen, stopped his horses, when he saw the little group at the roadside, and jumped out.

"Halloa, sissy! What's the matter?" he asked. "Man got struck by lightning?"

Naomi shook her head.

"No, he's sick; he's got some kind of a fever," she answered. "He was lying here in the woods and groaning, and then he got up and came a little way up the road before he fell down. I was afraid to leave him all alone."

"Seems to me I'd have been more afraid to stay with him," answered the boy. "He looks to me as if he was drunk," he went on, leaning over the prostrate man.

But there was no odor of liquor about the man's breath, and when the boy touched him he could tell, unused as he was to sickness, that fever was raging in his veins.

"I wonder what it is that's the matter with him," the boy said. "I suppose I'd better take him somewhere as long as I've got an empty wagon, though I'm almost afraid to touch him. I wonder where he belongs anyhow? Say, mister, where do you want to go?" he asked, giving the man a gentle shake. But he got no intelligible reply.

"Take him along to Miss Abigail's," said Naomi; "she'll know what to do about him."

"Well," the boy answered, "I'll see if I can get him into the bottom of the wagon. He looks pretty hefty to lift, but I guess I can manage it."

It was rather a hard task, even for the sturdy muscles of the farm-bred boy, to lift the weight of a helpless man, but he pulled and pushed, Naomi assisting with all her tiny strength, and at last he was safely deposited in the wagon.

"It's so hard for his head," said Naomi. "I'll hold it on my lap."

"Why, you're as wet as if you had been in the river," said the boy, looking at the child's dripping clothes. "You'd better put this old bag around you."

With the sick man's head on her lap, Naomi felt as if he was more comfortable, and twenty minutes later the wagon drove up before the door of the cottage, where the inmates were anxiously wondering about the child's safety. Miss Abigail assured Mrs. Harmer that they would detain her in the village till the storm had spent itself, but despite this assurance the mother's heart was filled with anxiety.

When they saw her seated in the bottom of the wagon they thought some accident had happened to her, but a moment later they saw that she was only holding some one's head in her lap and was uninjured herself.

"Here's some company for you, Miss Abby," the boy shouted, and Miss Abby hurried out to learn who her unexpected guest might be.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

It had been nearly two weeks since the Sunday afternoon when Tim Harmer had made up his mind to go back to his home and seek forgiveness from his old parents whom he had neglected for so many years. He had begun at once to put his resolution into effect, and when the sunset was touching the grand old cliffs of Marblehead with their reflected glory he had already set out upon his homeward way.

It was no easy task to take such a journey when he was almost penniless and was feeling the effects of a prolonged debauch. Fortunately a fishing smack, with whose captain he was upon terms of friendly acquaintance, was about to put out of harbor, and by taking passage on this vessel he was carried quite a distance on his way without cost.

As far as his money went he travelled by rail after that, but when his last cent was expended he was still many a long, weary mile from home. He had meant to work a day now and then for farmers, and get a little money in

that way to help him along; but he was too ill for that, so he tramped wearily along the dusty, never-ending road, sleeping at night wherever he could find a place, in some barn or beneath the shelter of a hedge, and begging his meals at the farmhouses he passed. A slow fever was burning in his veins and exhausting his scanty store of strength, and he was glad to beg a lift from wagons passing him on the road.

At last only one more day's journey lay between him and his home. He was almost too exhausted to crawl from beneath the hedge where he had spent the night, but the cup of strong coffee which a kindly farmer's wife gave him revived him somewhat, and he trudged doggedly on, not yielding to the weakness which every now and then threatened to overpower him. He was suffering not only from weakness, but from the cut on his head, which had not healed, but was growing more painful every day; and sometimes he was afraid that he would not be able to finish even the little distance that he thought now lay between him and his mother.

At last the village was reached, and he passed through the familiar streets which his boyish footsteps had so often traversed in past years. He would not pause to rest, but kept steadily on until he reached the river road, which was

so near home. The oppressive heat which heralded the storm made him feel faint and weak, and the fever burned so fiercely that his thoughts grew confused. He went down to the river's brink, and, leaning over among the rushes, bathed his face and hands and slaked his thirst.

It was useless to try and go any farther until he had a few moments' rest, for his aching limbs and swollen feet would not bear his weight. Yonder was the clump of trees which had altered so little since he saw them last, and with a little sigh of relief he crept in and lay down upon the cool bed of ferns and grass.

The pain in his head increased and forced deep groans from him, and he scarcely heeded the deep ominous rolling of the thunder, he was suffering so much. A feeling that he must not give up to this languor, that somehow he must get home, made him drag himself to his feet and stagger a little way up the road; but then strength and consciousness together left him and he fell prostrate.

Here it was that Naomi knelt beside him and sheltered him from the driving rain; but his thoughts were so full of home and mother that he did not heed his child protector, and babbled on brokenly of the rambling thoughts that were confusing his brain.

He was a boy again and heard his mother calling him, but somehow he could not go to her. His feet seemed bound and his head was too heavy to lift. When he was put in the wagon, consciousness had entirely left him, and so he did not know when at last his journey was ended and he had reached the little brown house that had been the goal of his long wandering.

Miss Abigail peered into the wagon with curious eyes, wondering who it could be that Dan had brought to her door.

"Who is it, Dan?" she asked, looking into the heavy, flushed face. "What did you bring him here for, and where did you find Naomi?"

"One question at a time, Miss Abby, if you please," answered Dan good-humoredly. "Who he is I don't know any more than you do; but he was lying there like a log in the public road, with sissy here minding him, and I just fetched him along to ask you what we should do with him. I'll drive him on to the poorhouse if you say so; for he's in for a spell of sickness, I reckon, and if you a'n't expecting him, he wont be welcome company."

"Poor fellow!" said Miss Abigail doubtfully. "I hate to send him along up there to the poorhouse, but I don't see my way clear to taking him in the house just now, when I've got others

to look out for. If I was alone, I might feel as if he was sent for me to take care of; but here's the baby and Naomi; they might get some awful sickness from him. What do you say, Mrs. Harmer?" she asked, as she saw Mrs. Harmer following Naomi out to the gate, listening to her story of the poor sick man. "Shall I let Dan drive him on up to the poorhouse?"

Mrs. Harmer looked in the wagon at the unconscious man. He was rolling his head from side to side and uttering confused murmurings of "Mother" and "Alice," and as she caught a glimpse of the face of the stranger Mrs. Harmer uttered a sharp cry, partly of pain and partly of surprise.

"Who is it?" asked Miss Abigail excitedly, while she studied the unconscious face earnestly, a faint recognition of features that somehow were strangely familiar stealing over her.

"My husband!" exclaimed Mrs. Harmer in trembling tones. "Oh, Miss Abigail, it is my husband! Poor Tim!"

"Tim!" ejaculated Miss Abigail; and then suddenly realizing that it was her brother, the wanderer for whose return she had waited and watched and prayed so long, that lay before her, she covered her face and shook from head to foot with her emotion.

"Well!" Dan ejaculated, as he looked from one to another of the agitated women. "I reckon you don't want him sent to the poor-house then, seeing he's a kin of yours. If you'll get his bed ready, Miss Abigail, for I reckon that's the place for him, I'll go across lots and get some one to come and help me lift him in, for he's too heavy for me to manage again without help. Wait, there's a carriage coming. I believe it's the doctor himself; now could anything be luckier!"

Miss Abigail was glad of the necessity for activity just then, and she hastily prepared the bed which Mrs. Ehrich had been occupying for the sick man, and when the doctor drove up a few moments later all was in readiness.

He helped Dan carry the man in, and between them they undressed him and put him in the soft, clean bed; then the doctor made an examination. He dressed the wound on his head and left medicine to allay his fever, telling Miss Abigail that with good care there was no danger to be apprehended.

"His fever is partly due to excessive fatigue and exertion, and he looks to me as if dissipation might have a good deal to do with it," the doctor said. "His head has not had proper care, but I think it will heal up now. Try to avoid

any shock when he comes to consciousness, if you can, and I will look in again in a few hours, on my way home, and see how he is."

It almost seemed as if, unconscious though he was, the sick man realized the change from the hard road to the comfortable bed, for he fell into a gentle, refreshing sleep, and seemed to be enjoying his surroundings, though he did not open his eyes or speak.

"Poor Tim! If mother could only have seen you come home before she died!" Miss Abigail said, studying her brother's face to see the alterations which twelve years had made in it, and remembering the firm belief, which her mother had never lost, that some day her boy would return.

"And isn't it a providence, one of God's own dealings, that he should come home to find his wife and child here under the old home roof! Poor boy, he must have loved mother through all, or he would n't have wanted to name his baby girl after her. It's no wonder I took to the little thing so, when she's my own flesh and blood. Queer I never suspected it, with the name alike and all, but it seemed too unlikely to be possible that Tim's wife and child should come home here without knowing it. Well,

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform,'"

and yet we are so short-sighted that we never look for him to do anything that we could n't do ourselves."

Naomi crept timidly into the room and looked half fearfully at the bandaged head upon the pillow.

"Wont you tell me about it, please, Miss Abigail? I can't understand it all, and mother is crying. Who is it?"

"Poor little lamb, did we all forget you?" and Miss Abigail put her arms around the child, and drew her close up to her with a new and joyful feeling of ownership, since she was Tim's little girl. "This is your father, dearie. He's been away from you and your mother ever since you were a baby, but he's come home now to take good care of you as soon as he's well again, and be one of the best husbands and fathers that ever was."

Miss Abigail's belief in the future was unbounded now, and she looked upon her brother's return as an indication that he had left all his evil ways behind him, and could look hopefully forward to his becoming all that he should be. If the mother's prayers had been so far answered, surely they would be wholly granted.

"Then shall we always live here in this beautiful place with you, Miss Abigail?" asked

Naomi, not knowing whether to rejoice or not at this new possession of a father, but quite able to appreciate the tangible good of never leaving this pretty home, where she was so happy.

"You must call me Aunt Abigail now, for you are my own dear little niece," said Miss Abigail, stooping to kiss the child. "Yes, dear, I hope you will always live here with me; but if that should not be, still I will often have you here for nice long visits. Now tell me where you found your father, dear, and all about it."

They went back into the kitchen, that the sound of voices might not disturb the sleeper, and Miss Abigail listened to Naomi's simple recital.

In the excitement of getting the sick man into the house, dripping little Naomi had been overlooked by both her mother and Miss Abigail, but Mrs. Ehrich had taken off her wet garments and rubbed her until the reaction had set in after her chilled feeling, and she was not feeling any the worse for her exposure.

Mrs. Harmer came down stairs presently, her eyes swollen with weeping, and passing quietly into the bedroom, knelt down beside her husband and looked long and earnestly at the face she had once loved. At first there was only an

angry, resentful feeling in her heart. This man had wronged her grievously. She had been a happy girl when he had won her love and induced her to leave her home, and since the day she had become his wife nothing but sorrow had been her portion. Hardships of all kinds she had known even before he left her, and she had learned to hate him as much as she had loved him. She had laid the broken hearts of her father and mother at his door, forgetting that if she had honored their wishes she would never have had anything to do with the dissipated, reckless young man to whom they would not willingly have entrusted their daughter's happiness. He had made her life intolerable with his selfishness and hasty temper while she was with him, and then he had deserted her in her feebleness, and never apparently remembered the existence of his wife or child.

How could she be glad that they were thrown together again, and that she must again have her life wrecked by his selfishness? Better that she should take Naomi that very night and wander out into the world again to hide themselves somewhere, than that she should again enter the bondage of unloved and unloving wifehood.

Tenderer thoughts came into her heart while she knelt there. The helplessness and suffering

of the unconscious figure touched the springs of pity in her woman's heart, and she could not bring herself to leave him now while he so needed a wife's care and nursing. True he had left her when she was ill and unable to care for herself, but she did not remember that as resentfully as she did a little while ago.

It had not been all Tim's fault that the first year of their married life had been one of such unhappiness. She had not been loving or patient, nor had she tried to encourage him to lead a better life. Perhaps there might even yet be a life of happiness in store for them if they should both begin over again, determined to do right and live so that God's blessing might rest upon them.

They had loved each other once, though it had not been with an unselfish, forbearing love, and it might be that God had brought them together again that they might learn to really love each other and make a happy home for each other and little Naomi. She would try to win her husband's heart again with love and patience, and then perhaps she could bring him to the Saviour whom she had learned to love. If their home was only a Christian one it could not fail to be a happy one. At all events she would not run away from the duty God had placed before her.

This unexpected meeting with the husband she had believed dead was of His ordering, and He had intended it for some wise purpose.

With a low moan the invalid moved his head uneasily, and Mrs. Harmer leaned over him and adjusted the pillow more comfortably. The very act of care brought back a faint glow of pitying affection, and Miss Abigail coming in just then smiled with pleasure.

"I was just studying about how you likely felt towards him," she said softly, as she stood by the wife's side. "I know he has n't treated you right, and that he do n't deserve anything from you or the child now; but I could n't help hoping you might find it in your heart to forgive him and give him a helping hand again. I know his faults as well as any one, for we grew up together; but I dare say I'm more inclined to excuse them on account of his being my brother; and I can't help thinking how happy we might all be, if only you could love him a little again and go back to him. If you were good to him now when he's so weak and helpless, he surely could n't but appreciate it, and I know he'd do his best to make up to you for the past when he's better again. Of course I do n't know anything of what's hidden away in his heart, but I can't help feeling that when he made up his mind to

come back home he meant to give up his bad life and make a new beginning. You'll help him in it, wont you, sister Alice?"

Tears filled the wife's eyes as she heard this loving title.

"Yes, I will begin again," she said softly, "and who knows but that God may have happiness in store for us yet?"

The vigil was divided that night between the wife and the sister, and so the nursing began which continued for days and weeks.

As soon as the people in Weston heard that the long-stray brother had returned and was ill, Miss Abigail received many kind offers, and felt that all were interested in the event which was so much to her; but she did not wish to let strangers enter the sick-room and see the wreck which dissipation as well as illness had made of the once handsome boy whom they remembered.

Mrs. Ehrich went home about a week after the invalid's coming. She was well and strong now, and the baby was a chubby, plump little fellow, who could hardly have been recognized as the frail mite of an infant that came there some six weeks before. The husband was growing lonely, and though he had been down twice to see his wife and child, yet he was eager to get them home again.

Miss Abigail would have been sorry to part with them if her heart and hands had not been so full just now with her brother. During these days of dependence and helplessness, when her husband had to have his slightest wants ministered to as if he was an infant, Alice Harmer learned to feel an affection for her husband that she could not have believed possible.

He had been more seriously ill than the doctor had thought at first, and there were a few days when his life hung in the balance, and it hardly seemed as if he had vitality enough left to withstand the tremendous drain his exposure and efforts to reach home had made upon his constitution.

Very earnest were the prayers which ascended from his bedside in the quiet night watches, that God would spare his life and give him back to them again. Naomi, too, nightly added her childish petition, "Please, God, bless father and make him well again."

A worthless life it had been in the past, and perhaps it hardly seemed worth the earnest pleading that ascended for its preservation; but both sister and wife looked forward hopefully to the possibilities of the future, and looked upon it as a boon which they could not too earnestly entreat.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BEGINNING.

It was long days before the fever in Timothy Harmer's veins subsided, and although he had several times opened his eyes and spoken to his two faithful nurses, he had not recognized either his surroundings or his sister and wife. He was conscious of their ministrations for his comfort, however, and learned to know Alice's light step and gentle touch, which were more soothing to him than Miss Abigail's more energetic movements.

One day, as Alice sat by his side, wielding a large fan gently to and fro, for the river breeze had died away, he opened his eyes and looked at her steadfastly, with a dawning of recognition in his gaze. A bewildered look crossed his face, and he looked about the room, evidently trying to make his troubled brain explain to him where he was and who was sitting beside him.

"Alice!" he said faintly, in incredulous tones, and she answered gently, laying her cool hand upon his forehead,

"Yes, Timothy, it is Alice, your wife. You

are at home again, and you have been sick. Go to sleep now, and I will explain it all to you when you wake up."

He seemed satisfied with her words, and was too weak to question her any further, so with a little sigh of content he closed his eyes again and fell into a light and refreshing slumber.

It was two days later before he asked any more questions or manifested any curiosity, and then when Miss Abigail was beside him he looked up and asked,

"Where is mother?"

Miss Abigail forgot all the waywardness which in his later years had made her harden her heart against him, and remembered only the love and pride that she had felt in the old days for this youngest brother, who had been the family pet in babyhood. Very gently she told him of the changes that had been made in the long years that had passed since he had left the old roof-tree, and told him of the forgiveness and blessing that the old people had left for him.

"Mother was sure to the last that you'd come home again to her, Tim," Miss Abigail said, "and she bade me tell you that she had loved you to the last. She's waiting and watching for you in a better home now, brother, and, please God, you must surely meet her there."

In those quiet hours of thought that followed, when he was too ill and weak to escape from himself, Tim had time for good resolutions. The husks upon which he had been living all these years had lost all power to satisfy him, and he felt that he could never return to his evil life and associates. The pure influences of his boyhood's home were stronger than the temptations of the life he had left behind him. A great desire to redeem the past filled his heart, and he determined that if his wife could forgive him he would atone for the past with all its mistakes and sin.

"Alice," he said one day, detaining her as she leaned over him to rearrange his pillow, "I've been a bad husband to you. I don't deserve that you should be so good to me; and yet because you are I am going to ask something more of you. Will you trust me to take care of you and the child, and will you help me make a home again? I mean to be a better man if you will help me. Can you forgive me?"

"I forgave you long ago," she answered, touching her lips to his sunken cheek, "and you have much to forgive too, Tim. We will both of us start over again, now that God has brought us together."

The days that followed were very happy ones to the occupants of the little cottage, and they

were drawn closely together in their new-found relationship. As the cooler days of September followed the heat of August, Timothy rapidly gained health and strength and began to plan for the future. Much to Miss Abigail's delight he was very anxious to stay under the home roof, and there was no fear but that he would be able to get plenty of employment as soon as his strength had sufficiently returned.

Christie was very happy over the thought that she had so unexpectedly been the instrument of bringing husband and wife together again.

As soon as Miss Abigail learned of the relationship of her guests she protested vigorously against allowing Christie to pay their board; but as she really needed the money, especially with the added care and expense of an invalid, Christie would not accept her refusal, but insisted upon her taking the money she had laid aside for that purpose.

Very small seemed the "nexte thynges" which came to Christie in these days, and sometimes she was tempted to wonder whether they were worth the doing. If she only had had Achsah's talents, or Florence's wealth, so much grander opportunities would have been open to her, and she had all of a girl's impatience with "the trivial round" which fell to her share.

Was she making the very best of her life, she asked herself impatiently sometimes, and then the memory of Aunt Patience's gentle counsel came to her troubled heart like a benediction. If she was doing "ye nexte thyng," then surely she must be going in the path in which the Lord would lead her and following his guidance.

Each day saw these little things lovingly and faithfully accomplished, although many of them were almost too trivial to record; yet this quiet ministry of helpfulness staightened many a rough place in others' paths and brought gleams of sunshine into dull lives.

In September her "nexte" came to her on this wise. As she was passing out of Sunday-school one day the superintendent spoke to her,

"Miss Gilbert, may I detain you a moment? I have something to speak to you about;" then as Christie stepped back towards the desk he explained to her that it had been thought best to try to establish a mission Sunday-school in a part of the village where the people who worked in the factory lived. It had proved an almost impossible task to persuade the children of this neighborhood to attend Sunday-school, and so the attempt was to be made to take religious instruction to them, by holding an afternoon meeting where they could not have the excuse of

distance nor lack of suitable clothing to prevent their attendance.

"Now I want to ask if you will volunteer to be one of our teachers, Miss Gilbert?" he said in conclusion.

Christie looked thoughtful.

"At what hour will the Sunday-school be held?" she asked.

"At half-past two, as that hour seems to be the most generally convenient," Mr. Elwood answered. "Perhaps I ought not to press you for an immediate answer," he went on, as Christie did not come to a decision at once. "You are right to think the matter over before you pledge your services, but I would be glad if you would send me a line to-morrow, and I trust you will see the way clear to sending a favorable answer, for we shall need earnest workers very much if we are to accomplish anything in that corner of the vineyard."

Christie promised to give the matter careful thought, and that afternoon when dinner was over, and she went up to her room for the hour of quiet reading that she enjoyed so much, she redeemed her promise. She had been wanting some work to do that would require self-denial and would produce fruit; but now that the opportunity had come she shrank from it.

In the first place she distrusted her own powers, and did not believe that she could teach as well as some one else who might volunteer if she refused. Aside from this there were other reasons why she did not want to promise her services. This afternoon hour of quiet solitude was a very restful, helpful one, and it would require a great deal of self-sacrifice to systematically forego it Sunday after Sunday, and walk to the other end of the village, instead, in all weathers.

Yet it was "ye nexte thyng," and dared she leave it undone because it was not just the form of service she would have liked? If the Master had laid this command upon her, "Feed my lambs," would she refuse to minister to these little ones in his name because her inclinations would have prompted some more pleasant service?

It did not take her very long to come to a decision after she had thought the matter over prayerfully, and she resolved to assure Mr. Elwood of her hearty coöperation in the work that very evening. Mrs. Gilbert heartily approved of the work, and was glad that Christie was to have a share in it, for she was never happier than when she saw her only daughter learning to consecrate her talents and powers in practical religious work.

The next Sunday afternoon saw Christie, with a dozen other helpers from the church, seated in the room which had been rented in the factory neighborhood and fitted up as a Sunday-school. About thirty children had gathered there, attracted by the hearty personal invitations and promises of picture cards that they had received from Mr. Elwood during the past week, when he had visited their homes, and about a dozen more were hanging about the outside of the door in little groups, looking as if they were ready to run if any advance was made towards them.

The opening exercises were interesting and well sustained by the teachers, although the children were too shy to take any part, even in the singing, and then classes were formed and apportioned to each teacher.

Christie found herself seated before four little girls about twelve years old, who looked at her half defiantly and half curiously as if wondering what she was going to do with them. Two or three times during the hour that followed Christie almost made up her mind to let this be her last attempt at teaching, for she found it such a hard task to gain or keep the children's attention.

The children's eyes wandered about the room or over her dress with a vacant stare, and the

only interest they seemed to feel was concerning a ring upon her finger. One of them shyly volunteered the question, "What is that ring made of anyhow?" and all the class listened for the answer; but after that, when she had turned it out of sight, that she might draw their attention to the lesson, they became listless again.

The lesson for the day was the story of Moses, and when Christie ascertained that none of them knew anything about him, she began at his babyhood, and dwelt upon each incident until she thought she had fixed it in their minds.

She had never more greatly exerted herself to make every word as interesting as possible, and when she paused to question the children she felt assured they would be able to give intelligent answers, notwithstanding their dull faces.

After eliciting with considerable difficulty the information that Moses was put in a basket in the bulrushes, Christie asked, "Why did his mother hide him away?" There was a perfectly blank look upon the faces before her, and the children did not seem willing to hazard an answer.

"I am sure somebody can tell me," said Christie encouragingly, trying not to lose her patience.

Still there was a silence, and not one face brightened in response to her pleasant smile.

"I might just as well give up at once," Christie said to herself despairingly. "If they can't answer a simple question like that after I thought I had explained everything so carefully, then they are too stupid ever to learn anything, or else I am not fitted to teach them."

"Can't you tell me, Becky?" she said after a moment's pause, addressing the least unprepossessing of the girls by name.

But Becky only shook her head and thrust her dirty thumb in her mouth.

"I know," said a girl at the other end of the class, and Christie's heart grew lighter at this encouragement.

"Well, suppose you tell me," she said.

"Why, because he was such a bad baby his mother could n't stand him around the house no longer."

Christie's first feeling was one of utter discouragement at this unlooked-for answer. She glanced sharply at the child to see if she was trying to say something mischievous, but one look at the stolid, undisturbed face convinced her that Maggie had hazarded her answer in good faith.

As her annoyance vanished a keen sense of the ridiculousness of the answer nearly overpowered her, and she barely restrained herself upon

the verge of a laugh. Fortunately she controlled her impulse, and without letting the child see her amusement she answered,

"No, that was n't the reason, Maggie, but I am glad you tried to answer."

She carefully went over that point in the lesson again, and then without trying to draw them out with any more questions, she resolved to spend the rest of the lesson hour in getting somewhat acquainted with these children who were so unlike any she had ever had anything to do with before.

The girls responded a little more readily and intelligently to her questions about themselves and their home life, and Christie opened her eyes in surprise when Maggie volunteered the information that she "kept house now, and minded the children as well."

"Is your mother sick?" asked Christie.

"She fell at the factory and broke her leg nigh two months ago," Maggie answered, "and it do n't seem to heal up right. She a' n't any more able to get around now than she was at first; so I mind things and do all the work."

"You must be a nice little housekeeper to get so much accomplished," said Christie, when Maggie, suddenly becoming quite confidential, told her that she cooked father's dinner and took

it to him at noon, besides doing the home work, for the two children next younger than herself went to school, and the three who were still younger were all too small to be entrusted with the dinner-pail.

A dull flush of pleasure crept over the child's face at Christie's words of praise, and when she went on to say,

"If you think your mother would like to see me, I will call and see her this week," Maggie's answer was prompt and satisfactory.

"Yes, she'd be right pleased, for she gets lonesome enough with nothing to do but lie still and think of her bad leg all day. I wish you would come."

By the time she had found out where Maggie lived, and had appointed Tuesday afternoon as the time for her visit, Mr. Elwood tapped the bell as a signal for the lesson to cease, and with a feeling of relief Christie leaned back in her chair and realized that the first session was over.

Was it of any use for her to keep the class? she asked herself, as the children left hastily, without the ceremony of saying farewell, eager to gain the freedom of the open air again.

She could not hope that they had learned anything, with all her careful preparation of the lesson and the effort she had made to awaken their

intelligent interest. Had her afternoon's work been of any use after all?

She asked Mr. Elwood the question as they left the room together.

"I am sure that they did not learn anything," she said in discouraged tones, "so what is the use of my coming?"

"Perhaps there is another question to ask," Mr. Elwood answered. "Did you learn anything, Miss Christie? It may be that the lesson to-day was for you to learn."

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Elwood?" and Christie looked up at him in astonishment.

"Perhaps you learned a lesson of patience and of perseverance in well-doing that repaid you for the sacrifice of your time," he responded. "Discouragement proves a very helpful ministry sometimes, although I grant it is a hard teacher. Yet if by forbearance and patience with these little ones, who try us so sorely with their indifference and lack of appreciation of our efforts, we learn the infinite forbearance and tenderness of our Heavenly Father with our failures, surely we need not think the lesson too hard to be worth learning. But you must not feel as if your afternoon had been wasted, even as far as these children are concerned, Miss Gilbert. If they did not remember anything of the lesson, it was a great step that

you made their acquaintance, and I saw one of them talking to you so freely that I felt greatly encouraged about your probable success with the class. The factory people are a community by themselves, and we must learn to reach down to them if we would hope to draw them up to a higher level. When they feel that we take a warm interest in their temporal affairs then they will believe in the sincerity of our desire to help them in spiritual matters. It will take a great deal of patient culture before we can expect to see the first fruits of the harvest; but we must sow in faith, believing that God can bring forth a hundred-fold harvest in his own good time."

Mr. Elwood's spirit of hopefulness was contagious, and Christie said nothing about her hastily formed determination to give up the class. She went home in a brighter mood, and at the tea-table amused her father and mother with an account of her afternoon's experience and Maggie's original reason for Moses' cradle among the bulrushes; but there was no thought now of giving up in despair, for she was determined to persevere and trust the results with God.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEW WORK.

CHRISTIE did not forget her promise to call upon Maggie's mother, and Tuesday afternoon she prepared for the visit, taking with her a little delicacy that she thought would be appreciated by the invalid.

She was a little shy about going alone, and had intended to persuade her mother to accompany her; but Mrs. Gilbert was lying down with a headache, so she had to go alone if she was to fulfil her promise of calling that afternoon.

"I think it will be better for you to go by yourself, dear," Mrs. Gilbert said, as Christie kissed her good-by. "You will have a better chance to get acquainted with the family, and they will talk to you more freely than if I should go too."

"What a forlorn place to live in!" Christie thought, as she daintily picked her way along the miserable pavement, with depressions here and there containing pools of rain water, in which some ragged children were playing, as happy as if they were ducks and in their native element.

"It is as bad as the tenement house streets in the city," Christie reflected, as she searched for the house to which Maggie had directed her. True, the blue sky was overhead, and there were no overhanging roofs to hide it, and there might have been an abundance of fresh air if the people of Factoryville, as this part of the village was named, had desired it; but the heaps of decaying refuse made the air heavy with foul odors, and very few windows were open with an attempt at ventilation.

From the promptness with which her knock was answered, Christie suspected that Maggie had been watching for her, and she was pleased at this indication of interest upon the part of one of her unpromising scholars. She was quite sure, too, that Maggie presented a more tidy appearance than was her wont, and that the family living-room had been put to rights in expectation of her call.

She found Mrs. Riley a rather unprepossessing woman, who took advantage of the unusual occurrence of a visitor to dilate upon her accident and all its attendant misfortunes in a whining voice, and to throw out numerous hints of what would be most acceptable.

"Ah, you don't know how hard it is to be poor and sick, with no one to do a hand's turn for

you, the house going to rack and ruin, and everything going out instead of coming in. God pity the poor anyhow."

"Now, mother, what's the use of going on that way?" interrupted Maggie, with sturdy honesty. "Things wasn't so awful much better when you was around. I think I'm the one to do the complaining as much as any one. I do all the work and keep the place looking better nor you did; and father's wages come in regular. He a'n't spent a cent on beer, only what you've had yourself, since you was took bad. I don't get no chance at schooling, but I don't see as you've anything to complain about but the pain."

"A'n't you ashamed to be talking to your poor mother that way, and before company, too," said her mother, evidently ill pleased at Maggie's candor. "Children don't know anything about what their mothers have to put up with, and it's no use expecting gratitude from them."

"I am sure Maggie does her best to be a nice little housekeeper," said Christie, feeling sorry for Maggie. "Is this the baby?" she asked, as a little toddler made his way across the room to hide his face in the bed-clothes and peep shyly at the visitor.

"Yes, that's the baby, poor little soul," sighed Mrs. Riley, who was determined to keep

the misfortunes of the family uppermost. "I'm ashamed for you to see him so poorly off for clothes, Miss Gilbert, but I haven't had the money to buy him a stitch this many a day. If I only had some of the clothes that rich people throw into the rag-bag, I could do a great deal towards fixing him up, but it's a hard world for the poor."

"He looks like a healthy little fellow," said Christie, with persistent cheerfulness, looking at the little face, which, though dirty and streaked with traces of his last meal, was plump and rosy.

"And it's a wonder," sighed Mrs. Riley, "for it's little enough of nourishing food he has to eat. When you have so many mouths to feed it's little enough one can put in them."

Maggie's face was scarlet as she listened to her mother's complaints, and Christie felt quite drawn to the girl as she made up her mind that in spite of her apparent stolidity she must have some delicacy of feeling underlying her rough exterior.

It was anything but a pleasant call, and Christie felt her sympathy for the invalid vanishing rapidly. It had been impossible to suggest any cheerful topic of conversation, for Mrs. Riley's response to every remark had been of the most lachrymose sort, and Christie had not tried to make her enjoy the call by commiserating her

misfortunes at any great length. She had expressed her sympathy for the accident, but when everything that Mrs. Riley said was plainly intended for a hint as to what would be acceptable in the family, Christie felt her generous impulses becoming adamant.

The baker's wagon went through the street, and as soon as she heard the bell Maggie seized an old pocketbook and darted out, soon returning with three loaves of bread.

"Do you get all that every day?" Christie asked in surprise, for it looked sufficient to her to provision a small regiment.

"Oh, my, yes, and sometimes we get more than this," Maggie answered. "The young ones eat a sight of bread and molasses."

Mrs. Riley had no commentary to make upon this speech. She could hardly complain that the children were insufficiently provided with food, when Maggie had called that pile of loaves the usual supply of bread.

"Do n't you ever make bread?" asked Christie. "I should think it would be a more economical way than to buy it from the baker."

"I'd like to make it if I knew how," Maggie answered, "but I have n't the first idea how to go about it. People do say it's so much more satisfying and it a' n't as dry as baker's bread. We

always buy stale loaves, because it's cheaper and it don't go quite so fast; but I'd like to make it instead if I could."

A sudden idea flashed into Christie's mind. Even if she could not succeed in interesting Maggie in the lesson on Sunday, there were some other things that she needed to learn which she could teach her. She had been carefully taught all branches of cooking by her mother, who believed housewifery to be as essential a part of a young girl's education as any study she might pursue at school. She could make sweet, light bread that even her mother, who was a notable housekeeper, could not excel, and she knew that she could teach Maggie this accomplishment.

"Maggie, would n't you like to have me teach you to make bread?" she asked. "I can make bread, and it is not at all a difficult thing to do; and I am sure I could show you so you could always make it."

Maggie's face brightened with a smile, and she was about to assent, when Mrs. Riley interposed,

"You're very kind, Miss Gilbert, but it would n't be worth while for you to take your time. Children are so flighty that you can't depend on them from one time to another. Maggie might make out once, but many a time she'd

only waste the flour, and so it would come to more in the end than it was worth."

A sullen look clouded Maggie's face, and Christie did not wonder at it.

"If I'm so flighty as all that," she said angrily, "it's a pity you can't see after things yourself. I'm tired enough, goodness knows, of doing all the work, and only getting pitched into for it all the time."

Christie looked as uncomfortable as she felt while these remarks were passing backward and forward between mother and daughter, for Mrs. Riley at once administered a prompt rebuke, with a tone in her voice that suggested the vixen when she was not too lachrymose.

Christie's impulse was to take her departure without waiting for any more unpleasant episodes; but something in Maggie's disappointed face, sullen though it was, touched her heart, and she determined to stay till she had won Mrs. Riley's consent to her project.

"I wish you would let me teach Maggie at any rate," she said pleasantly. "It will be a good thing for her to know how to make bread, and you might let her do it until you found that she failed too often to make it an economy. I have never failed yet, though I have made bread a good many times, and I don't believe Maggie

will. It would give me a great deal of pleasure to teach her."

Mrs. Riley was by no means disposed to yield, for she did not want to gratify Maggie's evident wish to accept the offer; but she hardly thought it good policy to refuse Miss Gilbert's request. It might be that she would be disposed to be generous, and she looked as if she could afford to be, shrewd Mrs. Riley reflected, so it would pay to humor her in this notion of teaching Maggie.

Even if she let the girl have her way in this, she could thwart her in some other desire. There was not much love lost between Maggie and her mother, and the pair were generally in a state of hostility, when each enjoyed annoying the other in any way that seemed practicable.

"Well, if you will be so good, Miss Gilbert, I am sure I've nothing to say against it," she said. "Though it's quite too much for you to trouble yourself that way."

"It is trouble that I shall be glad to take," Christie answered. "Maggie, I think the best way for you to learn would be to come up to our house this evening and see how the sponge for the bread is set; then you could do it yourself the next time. Suppose you should come about eight o'clock."

Maggie looked very much pleased, but she was afraid that if she expressed her pleasure too plainly, her mother might still interfere with her going, so she answered quietly,

"I'll come."

Christie was glad to take her leave, and as she went home she made up her mind that she certainly would never go to see Mrs. Riley again. If Maggie should be sick she would visit her, but she wanted nothing more to do with the mother; she was too thoroughly disagreeable.

Her heart warmed towards the child in a way that she would hardly have believed possible upon Sunday. It was no wonder that she looked dull and heavy, when there were no influences in her home or surroundings to brighten and stimulate her. She could see, too, that however stupid Maggie might be in the class, she was not lacking in a certain amount of common sense and energy about other matters, for the charge of the house, miserable as it was, was a considerable burden for a twelve-year-old girl to bear alone.

"Poor little thing, I should think her mother's remarks would discourage her," Christie thought, determining to do all that she could herself to stimulate Maggie's ambition.

She told her mother of her plan to teach Mag-

gie to make bread, and of her invitation to the child to come that evening.

"It will be real missionary work to teach her how to make good wholesome bread," Mrs. Gilbert answered. "I think I can improve upon your plan a little, though, dear. If, as you say, her mother does not seem very anxious to have her taught, Maggie may find it difficult to get the flour and other necessary articles. Suppose when she comes to-night you let her set a sponge here, and then she can come up in the morning and you can show her how to knead it up. Perhaps if her father tasted her first baking, he might appreciate the bread so much that he would encourage Maggie to keep on, and get the flour for her, so she would have no difficulty in trying her skill at home next time."

That afternoon as Christie was looking among her possessions for a piece of gingham which she thought would do nicely to make an apron for Maggie, she came across a bag which she had made the preceding Christmas with a number of others, but which she had not given away. All the girls in the Sunday-school class to which Christie belonged had made some of these bags as Christmas presents for a mission-school in the city, but this was one that had been left over. It was a bag made of flowered cretonne, contain-

ing a comb, a tiny looking-glass, a tooth-brush, a piece of soap, and a coarse towel.

"This will be the very thing for Maggie," thought Christie, remembering the shock of untidy hair, that looked as if it had never received any attention; and she laid it out with the gingham to give her little pupil when she should come.

Maggie made her appearance very promptly, and although she was very shy, yet there was an air of pleased expectation about her that satisfied Christie that she had been anxious to come. She was delighted with her present, and readily promised Christie that she would make use of the contents of the bag.

"I was afraid mother would n't let me get the flour," she said, when she found that Christie was going to let her make her first bread at Mrs. Gilbert's; "but if it's any way good, father said he'd get me a bag of flour for sure."

"This will be good, I am sure," said Christie, pleased at Maggie's enthusiasm, and she began her first cooking lesson, with the gray eyes intently watching every movement.

"Can you get time to come up here early in the morning?" she asked, when the bread was set and a clean cloth spread over the tops of the pans.

"Oh, yes," Maggie answered promptly. "The woman that lives next door to us, she told me she'd mind the house any time for me while I was learning to make bread, if I'd show her how afterward. She'd like to try her hand at it too, if I get along pretty well."

Christie was pleased that her lesson was to be transferred to another, and the first outlines of a plan began to take tangible shape in her active brain as she bade her scholar good-night.

"What are you thinking about, dear?" her mother asked a little later, as Christie sat wrapped in thought upon the porch steps.

"I believe I have a good idea, mother mine," Christie answered, "but I am not sure until I talk it over with you first. Do you think it's just because they are poor that the people in Factoryville are so dirty and live so wretchedly, or is it because they don't know how to do any better? Couldn't they have real palatable nourishing food, if they knew how to prepare it, without much more expense; and if they knew how to sew nicely, couldn't they look less ragged and neglected?"

"It is more ignorance than poverty," her mother answered. "The hands at the factory generally make pretty good wages, and if the wives had had a good training in housekeeping

they might live very comfortably and have pleasant homes; but the trouble is that most of them don't know how to do."

"I have a plan that seems a little Utopian and impracticable, but still I think that somehow it might be put into execution and be helpful," Christie said. "It's rather in a tangle yet, but I think you can straighten it out for me. Could n't we girls somehow have a class among those girls about Maggie's age and older, and teach them something about cooking and sewing? It seems to me it is almost necessary, in order to go with the teaching on Sunday, and perhaps we could reach them better if we learned to know more about them and their needs. We do n't want to drift apart and give up our class motto, and it seems to me that this would be a real helpful 'nexte thyng' if we could get it into working order. There are enough of us to divide up the work so it would not be too much of a burden upon one alone, and could n't we plan it all out somehow?"

"It would be an excellent idea," said her mother approvingly. "You might begin with the sewing-class, and then as soon as you could make arrangements for a cooking-class that could be added. I don't know of any work that would be better worth doing than teaching those

poor people how to make the best of their lives. I have always thought that it would be the most practical kind of temperance work to teach young girls how to make neat, well-cared-for homes, and then the saloons would not seem as inviting as they do now, by contrast with the dirty, disorderly rooms that many men call homes. Wholesome nourishing food would go far towards making liquor less craved, and a great deal of unnecessary unhappiness and misery would be saved. Perhaps just at first you might find a little difficulty in persuading the children to attend the sewing-class, but if you could manage to give them the garments they made, they would soon have their ambition stimulated and be anxious to learn."

"I am going to see the girls to-morrow, and find out if they would be willing to help," Christie said, her difficulties vanishing beneath the sunshine of her mother's approval. "It would be nice to begin this month if we could, for the afternoons are getting quite cool now, and I want to be sure that this will have a settled place in all our plans. I am getting quite enthusiastic over it, and in imagination I see poor little Maggie developing into a notable housekeeper and seamstress. It is n't much wonder that she does seem so dull and uninteresting when she has such

a home and such a mother. You can't imagine what a disconsolate, whining sort of woman she is, mother. She was just hinting for things all the time, and Maggie looked so ashamed."

"I think I have met just such people, dear," her mother answered, smiling at Christie's disgust. "I hope you will be able to help Maggie overcome the disadvantages of her home and make something of herself; but don't set your expectations too high, or I am afraid you may be disappointed."

"I'll try and limit my hopefulness just at present to success in her bread-making to-morrow," Christie responded. "I hope her mother won't interfere with her coming."

It would have taken a great deal of argument to have prevented Maggie from going to Mrs. Gilbert's the next morning, and she was up betimes that she might use her new possessions in making a far more careful toilet than was her custom. Christie had emphasized the necessity of having clean hands, so Maggie scrubbed away at hers with unremitting diligence till they were red and shining with the vigorous application of soap and water. Her hair was freed from the wilderness of tangles, although it had been an almost interminable piece of work to impatient Maggie to reduce it to a smooth braid, and

she wondered two or three times whether Miss Christie would notice the improvement.

She felt quite repaid for her exertions when her young teacher cordially praised her neatness, and she determined to keep herself looking tidy all the time, since it made her so much more attractive in appearance. A ribbon to tie her hair completed her happiness, and she told Christie she would comb her hair every morning now, so that it would never get so tangled again. She had left her usual morning tasks in charge of the kindly neighbor, so that she could stay until the loaves of bread were taken, crisp and odorous, from the oven.

Maggie surveyed the loaves with undisguised admiration and delight.

"Well, father will never believe I made these!" she exclaimed. "I wont put a knife to them till he sees them, for he'll be so pleased. I'm sure he will always want me to make our bread now, and we wont have to eat those old stale loaves from the baker's wagon."

Between Maggie and her father there was evidently a great deal of sympathy, and when the child started off triumphantly with her basket of bread on her arm, her first thought was of her father's pleasure in her success.

Christie was almost as delighted as her pupil,

and she was eager to talk over her plan for more extended instruction with the girls and secure their coöperation in the work.

It was quite as easy a task as she had anticipated, for the girls were ready for work. They had so thoroughly enjoyed carrying out their plans for Mrs. Elrich that they were eager and ready for "ye nexte thyng."

CHAPTER XIX.

HARVESTS.

"WELL, does n't this look just tempting !"

Louise was flushed and tired, but she looked about her with such satisfaction that all her weariness was quite forgotten. There was a chorus of assent to her remark as five other girls looked around approvingly.

"Great oaks from little acorns grow," spouted Louise, and she voiced the thought that was in the hearts of her companions.

Nearly four months ago they had gathered a few of the girls from Factoryville into a sewing-class, and twice a week had laid aside their own occupations and pleasures and devoted themselves to teaching their scholars the use of the needle. After the sewing-class was firmly established and had begun to prosper, a cooking-class was begun under many difficulties, which was well attended by all who had heard of Maggie's fame among her neighbors as a bread-maker.

The lack of a suitable room and appurtenances hampered the girls very much, but the mothers

came to the rescue when they found how much good could be accomplished by this movement which their girls had begun. A suitable room was rented in Factoryville, and furnished with some of the necessary appliances, though there was still much to be desired before it would be fully equipped. When the girls had once become interested in their pupils, Mr. Elwood had no trouble in engaging their assistance in the Sunday-school, and the mission-school was in a very encouraging condition.

The harvest of the four months of faithful work was beginning to ripen, and the hearts of the toilers were rejoiced by these indications of success. In many of the miserable homes in Factoryville there were signs of marked improvement. The girls were beginning to take pride in trying to keep themselves and their surroundings neater, and wholesome food was taking the place of the greasy, ill-cooked viands with which they had formerly contented themselves.

The young teachers had planned a supper to be cooked and served by the members of their cooking-class for the benefit of the room, and they hoped that they might realize enough to enable them to purchase the other needful appliances for their work. They had spent the day in decorating the room, preparing the tables, and

making everything look as inviting as possible, and now, while they took a few moments of well-earned rest, they looked about upon their handiwork with just pride, the pretty rooms and the tempting-looking viands seemed such great results to have grown from their first feeble efforts.

It was the day before Christmas, and the joyous spirit of that holiday was in their hearts, but the sweetest pleasure, although none of them expressed it, was in the thought that the Master had accepted and blessed their work for him, and that their lives were not spent for self and selfish gratification.

The evening proved to be even more successful than the young managers had hoped, and the money that came in freely was a tangible evidence of the interest and sympathy their friends felt in their work, besides assuring them that they would be able to carry out their plans for greater usefulness.

"Our 'nexte' has grown to be larger work than we could have believed at first," Christie said that night to her mother as, thoroughly tired out but very happy, she walked homeward. "It seemed such a small thing when we first started it, but it is growing all the time, and we are really beginning to see good results from it. The

children are improving wonderfully in more things than cooking and sewing."

"Perhaps you will never see the final results," her mother said. "The 'nexte thynges' that seem so small just now may be links in a chain that will reach others that you have never heard of or seen, and influence them for good. It is all in God's hands, and he can use very feeble efforts that have been made in his name to carry out great purposes."

They were passing the quiet village of the dead now, and Christie looked among the white stones that marked the resting-place of loved ones until her eyes lighted upon a slender shaft that glistened pure and spotless in the moonlight.

"I wish Aunt Patience could know how she still helps me," she said softly. "When I feel all out of patience with these little things I remember her last talk with me, and it helps me so to feel that nothing is too small to be worth doing since it is God's appointment for me. She made the ministry of 'nexte thynges' seem as glorious as any great work. Of course sometimes I can't help wishing that I could do something that would result in things that seemed more worth accomplishing, but still on the whole I have learned not to undervalue little things.

"I cannot see that the world is any the bet-

ter since last June because I have lived in it, or that I have brought very much happiness to any one; but I have tried to 'doe ye nexte thyng,' so I am content to 'leave all resulting' with God."

The results of the "nexte thynges" were for the most part beyond Christie's knowledge, but there was much fruitage that she might have claimed, if she had traced her work.

Achsah, happy and successful, with her talents consecrated to God's service, might have told how much encouragement she owed to Christie, and how the timidly written invitation to her to share the peace which her friend had found had led her to Christ.

Christie knew that she had been the instrument of bringing together the long-estranged husband and wife, but there was one part she had in the wanderer's return that she never knew: if she had not first brought her friend to Christ, the sweet story might never have been told which fell upon the prodigal's ears, and made him determine to leave the far country and go back to his father's house.

Through Christie's inspiration the girls who might have let their lives drift along aimlessly, with no thought but that of their own gratification and pleasure, had learned the ministry of

helpfulness, and in the unwritten record of each life there were many "nexte thynges" that had brightened the lives of all who came in contact with them, though they were very simple and unobtrusive deeds of self-denial.

The harvest that resulted from their united efforts was one that they could rejoice in as they saw it beginning to ripen, and it encouraged them to renewed effort.

The last evening in the old year the girls met at Mrs. Gilbert's to welcome in the new year together and bid farewell to the old. Achsah was with them, for she had come to spend her holidays with Christie. The hours sped swiftly away in games and merriment, but at last, when the hands of the clock pointed to half-past eleven, they quieted down as they realized that in half an hour more the old year with its record would have passed away for ever. They were quiet for a while as they grouped themselves about the open fireplace with its blazing coals.

"Christie, tell us your thought," said Louise, "as we agreed last week to do."

"Will you each give us some favorite selection if I set the example?" Christie asked.

"Yes, we have all brought a contribution to this thought feast," Achsah answered in the name of the rest.

"I recalled some lines I read a few weeks ago," Christie said, "and it almost awes me to think what influences we may be unconsciously putting in motion:

"Our many deeds, the thoughts that we have thought,
They go out from us, thronging every hour,
And in them all is folded up a power
That on the earth doth move them to and fro;
And mighty are the marvels they have wrought
In hearts we know not, and may never know.'"

There was a pause after Christie's words died away; then Louise spoke,

"Now, Elsie."

"I like these lines," said Elsie, and she read with feeling:

"May every soul that touches mine—
Be it the slightest contact—get therefrom some good,
Some little grace, one kindly thought,
One aspiration yet unfelt, one bit of courage
For the darkening sky, one gleam of faith
To brave the thickening ills of life,
One glimpse of brighter skies beyond the gathering mists
To make this life worth while
And heaven a surer heritage.'"

"My thought is in the same channel as Christie's," said Florence, as the girls turned towards her.

"The deeds we do, the words we say,
Into thin air they seem to fleet;
We count them ever past,
But they shall last.
In the dread judgment they
And we shall meet.'"

"Now, Grace, let us hear from you;" and the girlish voice repeated,

"God's plans, like lilies, pure and white unfold.
We must not tear the close-shut leaves apart;
Time will reveal the calyxes of gold.
And if through patient toil we reach the land
Where tired feet with sandals loose may rest,
Where we shall clearly know and understand,
I think that we will say, "God knew the best."'"

"Louise, what is your word for us?" asked Christie.

"It is very short, but it helps me," Louise said, and she read:

"Thou cam'st not to thy place by accident.
It is the very place God meant for thee,
And shouldst thou then small scope for action see,
Do not for this give room to discontent,
Nor let the time thou owest to God be spent
In idly dreaming how thou mightest be.'"

"My lines are only what I wish might be true," said Ella.

"That Thy full glory may abound, increase,
And so Thy likeness shall be found in me,
I pray. The answer is not rest or peace,
But charges, duties, wants, anxieties,
Till there seems room for everything but Thee,
And never time for anything but these.
The busy fingers fly, the eyes may see
Only the glancing needle which they hold;
But all my life is blossoming inwardly,
And every breath is like a litany,
While through each labor, like a thread of gold,
Is woven the sweet consciousness of Thee.'"

All had read save Achsah, and the girls turned towards her as she sat with clasped hands looking into the glowing embers. Her words were a fitting close to the harmony which the others had expressed in their garnered thoughts, each passage a note in the chord of love to the Master.

“ ‘ God’s angels drop like grains of gold
Our duties ’mid life’s shining sands,
And from them one by one we mould
Our own bright crown with patient hands.
From dust and dross we gather them ;
We toil and stoop for love’s sweet sake,
To find each worthy act a gem
In glory’s kingly diadem,
Which we may daily richer make.’ ”

As she finished reading the hour of twelve chimed from the church tower, and the old year passed away, giving place to the new, with its opportunities and temptations, its pleasures and trials.

Each young heart knew the failures of the last year, but as the clean page was turned over to begin a new record, the resolve was registered anew which would prevent many a mistake and heartache, and from her quiet resting-place Aunt Patience still spoke,

“ Doe ye Næxte Thynges.”









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